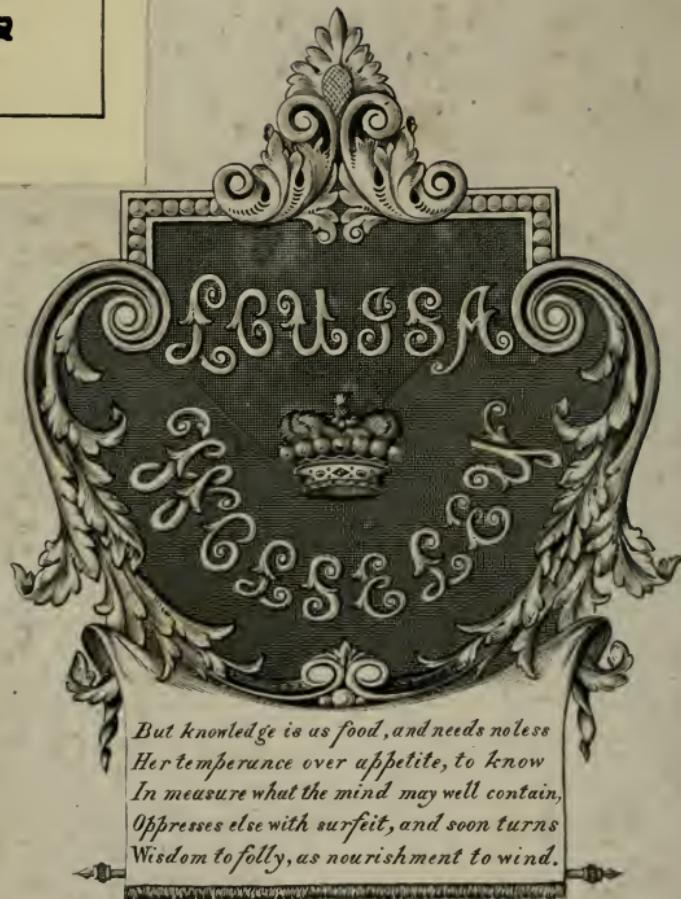
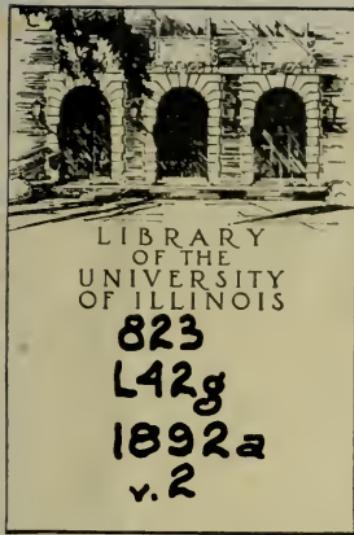


Grania



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G R A N I A

VOL. II.

By the same Author

HURRISH: a Study

IRELAND (Story of the Nations Series)

MAJOR LAWRENCE, F.L.S.

PLAIN FRANCES MOWBRAY, &c

WITH ESSEX IN IRELAND

G R A N I A

THE STORY OF AN ISLAND

BY THE

HON. EMILY LAWLESS

AUTHOR OF 'HURRISH, A STUDY'
ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

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PART III

MAY to AUGUST

PART III
MAY TO AUGUST

CHAPTER I

THUS the weeks went on, one week after the other, all exactly alike, and no new light came to aid Grania in her investigations about the stolen turf. What was hardly less important, however, the depredations themselves ceased. From the night on which she had pursued the thief through the gully and lost him at the mouth of it, no fresh inroads, so far as she could discover, had been made in the stack, and, this being the case, she was content for the present to let the matter be. She had a kindly feeling

towards poor Pete Durane, and if he were the culprit would have been sorry to have been forced to bring the guilt home to him. If, on the other hand, it was Shan Daly—the only other person she could think of as likely to be guilty—though she hated that miscreant as she hated no other person in the world, still, there was his wretched wife to be thought of, and his equally wretched family. As well, too, hope to extract blood from flints as get any satisfaction or compensation out of Shan Daly, and, as for the mere vindictive pleasure of punishment, the ties of kinship and acquaintanceship are far too closely drawn in so limited a community as Inishmaan for that sort of pleasure to be often resorted to. If we were on visiting terms with the families of our pick-pockets and burglars, those artists would be even less interrupted in the exercise of their vocations than they are at present.

Meanwhile the work of the year had to be gone on with. Grania was feeding up a calf, as well as two pigs, to be sold at the Galway spring fair. The freight charges from Inishmaan to Galway were serious—not less than half a crown for every calf and a shilling apiece for the pigs; whereas the freight charges to Ennistimon were much less; but, then, the chances of a good sale at the Galway fair were considerably greater, and, on the whole, therefore, she had decided to send them there.

Her other work was now lighter, for there was nothing to be done to the potatoes till autumn, and she had hardly any oats. In the Aran isles the land is divided into townlands, every townland containing so many ‘quarters,’ every quarters so many ‘croggeries,’ every croggery so many acres. Inishmaan possesses but two townlands, containing six quarters each, with sixteen crog-

geries to every quarter, and sixteen acres to every croggery. Grania and Honor held a little over one croggery, six acres of which was pure stone, leaving some ten or eleven to be reckoned upon. Of these, half were laid down in potatoes, while the remainder served as pasturage, eked out, of course, with a good deal of surreptitious aid from the bent-grass below.

As for the weather, it seemed to be getting daily worse. So wet and miserable a spring had rarely been experienced, even upon Inishmaan. To rain in moderation, nay, something more than moderation, no Aranite, as explained, objects, but, even of the best thing, it is just possible to have too much, and such incessant deluges as followed day after day, and night after night, were this year beyond the recollection of the oldest inhabitant. If the destiny of the islands was sooner or later to be washed away and to

vanish from sight in the sea, it seemed as if now was the time that destiny was likely to be fulfilled. The rain came down in literal sheets, and in sheets it swept over the surface. There being no earth for it to dry into, it poured over the level slabs, sweeping from slab to slab almost as the sea swept over the rocks between the tide-marks. Watching it at such moments, it would have seemed to you as if the whole island would shortly become one great waterfall, or scarcely perceptible reef for the Atlantic to roll over, the water, as it descended upon the slabs, falling into the troughs or tunnels laid ready for it, and out of them again until it found rest in the final trough awaiting it at the bottom.

About a fortnight after her visit to the Duranes, Grania was standing one evening at the door of the cabin looking down the track towards the sea. It had been raining heavily

all day, and had now come on to blow hard. Across the nearest sound and above the cliffs of Clare the sky wore a greenish look, especially where it showed between dark roving patches of cloud. At the base of the island the cooses and small bays on the west and north-west were astir with the hissing of waves. The rising wind tore and whistled its way noisily through the sparse hawthorn-bushes and ragged growth of brambles and hemlocks. The night, clearly, was going to be a nasty one.

The girl leaned against the shelter of the doorway and looked out towards the ‘Old Sea.’ It was growing dark, but there was a pale splinter of white light far away, almost lost on the horizon—a sinister light, like a broken war-arrow. Everywhere else the plain was one mass of leaden-coloured waves, solid and unillumined. The sense of a vast crowd, coming steadily onward, struggling together

by fits and starts, with many side-battles and cross-currents, but on the whole bearing steadily down upon some devoted foe, pressed upon the mind as you looked out seaward.

Nearer, the prospect was not much more cheerful. The wind howled viciously, tearing off fragments of scaly stone from the rocks and flinging them against the windows and over the roof like so many forest leaves. Little Phelim Daly was in the O'Malleys' cabin. He had come, as he often did, to share their evening meal, and Grania had decided to keep him, finding the night so wild, and had run across in the teeth of the rising gale to tell his mother so. He was not exactly an enlivening guest, and this evening seemed to be even more nerve-ridden than usual. After finishing his share of the potatoes and milk, he sat for some time hunched up, with his knees and his chin together, close

to the fire. As the storm rose louder and the gust came faster and faster down the widely-gaping chimney, he grew uneasy, looked furtively round the walls, then up at the narrow slip of sky visible through the small pane of glass, shaking from head to foot as he did so, and seeming to see something out there that he dreaded, something that he was unable to resist staring at, but which scared him with the utterly unreasoning fear of an animal in presence of that which arouses all its latent hereditary terrors.

Glancing round from her post beside the doorway, Grania saw him staring thus, with parted lips and glassy eyes, agonising fear written in every lineament. Suddenly, as she watched him, a great shiver ran through his whole body, his very shadow thrown by the firelight against the opposite wall vibrating violently as a leaf vibrates in a sudden storm.

‘Why, then! Why, then!—God look down on the child!—what ails him to-night?’ she asked in a tone of astonishment. ‘What is it, Phelim—what do you see out there, sonny, at all, at all?’ she added, going over and stooping down beside him upon the hearth.

For all answer the boy only shivered the harder, clutching her at the same time, and holding her petticoat tight in his two hands, as if to hinder himself from being forcibly dragged away by someone.

‘ ’Tis in his bed he should be at this hour, the creature!’ Honor said from her own corner, where her pale face showed extremely like a ghost’s, framed as it was on two sides by the smoke-stained chocolate walls. ‘It is not a night for anyone to be looking about them, either in or out of the house, so it is not,’ she added, crossing herself fervently. ‘Shut the door, Grania, and put on another sod of the turf. God save us!

but it is the wild weather ! There is no end to the bad weather this year, so there is not. Glory be to Him that sent it, wet or fine !'

Grania obeyed, shut the door and heaped on an additional armful of turf; then stood for awhile beside the fireplace, listening to the wind as it roared down the unprotected chimney.

It was indeed a night to set even sober brains afloat with nervous terrors. The little house seemed to be an atom lost in the hungry vortex of the storm and oncoming darkness. A sense of vast, uncurtained space—of tossing, interminable vastness—of an aërial ocean without bourne or limits, seemed to press upon the mind as you sat and listened. They were as lonely, those three, as though they had been the only occupants of some star or planet set in the hollow void of space. Even the yellow cat, who was rarely or never friendly, seemed to feel the influence

of the weather, and came of her own accord close up to Grania, rubbing against her as if glad to increase the sense of home and shelter by touching someone.

As Honor had said, the only thing, clearly, to do with Phelim was to put him to bed. Grania accordingly made him lie down close to the wall, upon the sort of make-shift of a bed which filled the corner where she herself slept, telling him, as she did so, to turn his head well away from the light, and to cover his ears close up with her old flannel petticoat, so as not to hear the storm. This done, she returned to her former place beside the fireplace.

CHAPTER II

SHE drew up her own particular creepy stool, and sat down, staring at the tongues of red flame as they were blown in towards her, every now and then, by a fresh gust from above.

Her thoughts and the night seemed to her to match one another. She had seen little or nothing of Murdough Blake for the last fortnight, one reason being that he had been away from Inishmaan at Ballyvaughan, in company with Shan Daly and other kindred spirits, sharing in a sort of rude regatta, got up by the hooker and curragh owners of the neighbourhood. A report had come to her through a friendly neighbour that he had

been all this time drinking hard—nay, had been seen by someone lying dead drunk in the Ballyvaughan street. Whether this was the case or not, she knew that he was spending money, for the only time she had seen him had been late one evening, when he had come up to beg for a loan—not for the first or the third time either that year. She had given him the money, it being for a debt, he said, and she having a little that she could spare, and had not even reproached him, beyond telling him that it must positively be for the last time.

Grania suffered as strong people suffer. Not patiently, nor yet with any particular inclination to complain, but with a suffering that was a sort of fire in her veins. She would have liked to have taken the matter, then and there, into her own strong hands ; to have beaten Shan Daly—recognised aider and abettor in every misdeed—soundly with

her own two fists ; to have dragged Murdough by force out of this ditch which his own folly was slowly digging below him. Yet, what could she do ? There was only one way of getting any more hold on him, and that was by marrying him. That, however, was at present impossible. Apart from Honor's increasing illness there was no place ready for them, excepting this cabin, and how could he come there ? Besides, even if she did marry him, what then ? could she be sure of getting any more hold over him ? of stopping him from drinking ? of inducing him to do anything she wished ? Did he even care much about what she wished ? Did he care much about her in any way, in fact, except so far as he cared for the cows and the pigs, and the other possessions she owned ? Did he—Would he— Had he— ?

She thrust her pampootie-shod foot suddenly into the turf, kicking it to right and

left, as these thoughts crowded upon her mind, and making it flare away wildly up the chimney in a tangle of scarlet sparks.

She had forgotten Honor for the moment, or thought perhaps that she had fallen asleep. This, however, was clearly not the case, for at that moment her soft guttural voice made itself heard from the corner.

‘What ails you then to-night, sister dear?’ she asked gently. ‘What makes you look so wild? Is it the storm that scares you?’

Grania started, then recovered herself. ‘May be indeed, Honor, it was the storm I was thinking of,’ she said in as indifferent a tone as she could muster. ‘It *is* a bitter black night and an ugly one, God knows,’ she added, looking up at the square of window, through which a faint drizzle of light still shone. There was a few minutes’ silence in the cabin, broken only by the moaning of the wind, the spitting of the fire, and the soft

recurrent sound of the boy's breathing. Suddenly a hollow, bull-voiced roar came rushing up the gully, followed by the angry thud of the sea against the rocks at the bottom of the slope. It seemed to Grania like a voice outside herself, a voice roaring confirmations of her own thoughts, and, with an impulse of disburdening herself of some at least of these, she went on :

'Isn't it queer, Honor, to think of all the trouble there is, far and near, over the whole, big world? Sure when one looks out over the sea and the land yonder, and beyond that again, and thinks of it all, there seems to be nothing but trouble and trouble and trouble, and more trouble upon the top of trouble. God help us! what are we brought into it for at all, at all, I sometimes wonder, if there's to be nothing for us but trouble and trouble and trouble? 'Tis bad enough for the men, but it's worse a hundred times for the

women ! Where's any happiness coming to any of us from at all, at all, I want to know ? I can't see much of it, look where I will, Honor, so I can't. Can you?—say, sister allanah—can you ?'

Honor opened her mild brown eyes to their widest possible extent, and half raised herself up in bed in wonder at such questionings.

'Sure, child ! isn't God everywhere?' she exclaimed simply. 'And happiness ! Why, saints above ! who ever heard of such talk ! Happiness ? God love the child ! what were any of us, and women specially, sent into the world for, except to save our souls and learn to bear what's given us to bear ? Augh, Grania, Grania ! don't be looking for happiness, child, for I tell you you won't get it—not married nor single, sick nor well, rich nor poor, young nor old ; for 'tisn't in it at all, at all, so how can you expect to find it ? 'Tis only in heaven there's any real, right happy-

ness, child, as I'm always telling you, and 'tis not till you get there that any one need think to find it, nor couldn't, not though they were to hunt for it the whole world over, and get under the sea-water, too, looking for it! And for a woman!—why, child, 'tis impossible! To bear and bear, that's all she's got to do, so she has, till God sends her rest—nothing else. Isn't that what she has come into the world for, no other? Oh, but 'tis the priest himself should be telling you all that, and not me that knows so little. If you could only once get your heart to the right way of thinking, child asthore, 'tisn't tormenting yourself with any such follies you'd be this night, nor any night, either! Sure, the priest would tell you that there's no happiness in this world for a man, let alone for a woman; only trouble, and trouble, as you say, on the top of trouble, and will be as long as the grass grows and the

rain falls, and the streams run, and the sea goes round Ireland, and that will be till the world itself comes to an end, so it will !'

Grania for all answer thrust her foot again amongst the turf, making it flare and sputter like a Catherine wheel.

'Then I don't believe it—nor want to believe it—nor to hear it, what's more—not though every priest in Ireland or the world were to say it !' she suddenly burst out angrily.
'And it is all very well for you, Honor, a saint born, wanting nothing and caring for nothing, only just the bit to keep you alive and the spot to pray on. But all women are not made like that. My God, no ! There's many and many a one would let themselves be cut in little pieces or burned alive, any day in the week, if so be they were loved back, but, if not, 'tisn't better they'd get, but worse and wickeder every day, till they'd be fit to kill themselves or other people, so they would.

and what good would that do to anyone? Sure, I know 'tis just nonsense talking like that to you. A nun born you are, Honor, and always have been; but I'm not—so there, I tell you, sister—for what's the good of me lying to you, and only us two left alone in the world and likely soon, God help me! to be only one of us! Sure, He knows I'd do anything to please you, Honor—you that were a mother to me, and more. But say I'd sit down easy with such a skin and a bones of a life as that, and no happiness till I come to die?—and saints know what I'd be like then!—why, I can't, Honor, I can't, and that's the whole truth! The priests may tell all they will of heaven, but what is it to me?—just *gosther!* 'Tis here I want a little bit of the happiness, so I do. Maybe 'tis very wicked, but I could not feel different, not except I was to die first and to be born right over again, so I couldn't!'

She looked over at her sister's corner as she finished speaking, half-defiantly, half with a feeling of apprehension, expecting a fresh burst of reprobation in response to this outburst. Poor Honor's remonstrances, however, were exhausted. Her strength was so slight that a very little overset it, and she began to cry helplessly, uttering a soft sobbing sort of wail, more to herself than to Grania, repeating over and over again that it was all *her* fault—all *her* fault the child was lost and destroyed, and all through *her*! What had she been doing? what had she been doing? Oh God! Oh God! what *had* she been doing?

Grania's compunction awoke in a minute at the words. They had far more effect on her than a more finished remonstrance would have had. Leaping up from where she was squatting beside the fire, she ran over to the bed, and, leaning over the sick

woman, began trying to soothe her back into quietness, heaping abuse upon herself at the same time for having disturbed her.

‘Sorrow take me for a fool ! what ailed me at all to be troubling you, and you just beginning to settle down, and enough trouble of your own to bear, God knows ! and more than enough?’ she exclaimed penitently. ‘Tis beat I should be if I got my rights this minute, and if you’d the strength to do it I’d ask you to beat me with a big stick, and welcome, Honor. Bad end to myself if I know what ailed me ! ’Twas just the wild looks of that creature Phelim that put foolish thoughts in my head, that and the storm, ne’er another thing. Sure, sister dear, Honor sweet, you’ll settle to sleep again and be easy, won’t you ? Don’t be punishing me by saying you won’t, or ’tis biting off my tongue another time I’ll be, rather than talking to you. Don’t all people have foolish

thoughts in their heads some time or other, and you wouldn't be troubling about any nonsense I'd say? Is it your own foolish little Grania, that always was a troublesome, ignorant little *preghaun* from the time she could run by herself?—only you so good and patient 'twas more like one of the saints out of heaven than a woman. Will I sing you the “*Moderagh rue*” then, or “*Sheela na guira*” till you'll sleep? Weary upon this wind! 'Tis that that sets us all mad this night, I think, and puts it into my head to be talking nonsense. Hark at it battering against the door, as if it was wanting to burst it in, whether or no! There, there, Honor, you'll shut your poor eyes, and not be thinking about another thing, good or bad, till the morning. And, maybe, please God! it will be fine then, and you'll see the sun shining in at the door, and the little boats dancing up and down on the water, the way you

like. Sure, 'tis in May we are now, and the bad weather can't last for ever and ever, so it can't.'

Honor shut her eyes, more to please Grania and satisfy her entreaties, than because she felt any inclination to sleep. Little by little, however, exhaustion crept over her, and she fell into a doze, which passed by degrees into broken, uneasy slumbers. Even in her sleep, however, it was clear that the same thoughts pursued her, for from time to time she would sigh heavily, her lips uttering now a broken prayer, now some tender self-accusing word, while in her eyes, had there been light to see them, the large tears might have been seen gathering slowly, and stealing one after the other down the hollows of her poor thin cheeks.

Finding that she really was sleeping, Grania presently left her bedside, and sat down again beside the now all but invisible

fire, her thoughts wandering first to one thing then to another as she listened to the wind. Once, too, she got up and went over to the door to make sure that there was no danger of its being burst in by the blasts that kept rushing one after the other against it like battering rams through the narrow funnel. Then, having carefully covered up the *greeshaugh*, or hot embers, so as to be able to light the fire in the morning, she, too, lay down beside little Phelim, pushing him gently over a little nearer to the wall in order to find room for herself upon the same well-worn narrow pallet.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT the still more exposed cabin of the Duranes the storm raged yet more furiously, and awoke, one after the other, all its inhabitants, no less than nine of whom were sleeping under its roof that night. It blew the white turf-ashes out from the chimney in such a shower over Pete himself, who was sleeping upon the right-hand side of the fireplace, and whose mouth happened to be wide open at the time, that it became filled with them, in getting rid of which he uttered a succession of sputtering sounds which had the undesirable effect of arousing his wife and exciting her never very distant wrath.

‘*Monnum a Dhea!*’ is it waking the

children you want to be after *now?*' she asked in a tone all the more acrid from its enforced lowness. Then, with a 'Whist! whist! whist!' addressed to the baby, she began, gently but rapidly, thumping that important personage's back, so as to hinder it, if possible, from awaking.

Unfortunately the action brought her elbow into sudden sharp contact with the head of the youngest little girl who had nestled close up to her for warmth, and who immediately responded with a loud howl, which in its turn aroused Juggy Kelly, Pete's niece and the general servant of the establishment, who slept with the chickens in a sort of loft overhead, and who, with a vague idea that something was suddenly being required of her, began, half awake, to hist and hoost vigorously, as if she were driving in geese or turkeys to roost.

'Auch! listen to that creature!' muttered

the mistress of the house in a tone of yet more acrid displeasure—a displeasure only kept low by the fear of awakening the rest of the still slumbering flock. ‘*Bedhe husth! Bedhe husth!*’ she called up in a shrill whisper in the direction of the offender. ‘Troth, and I might speak to the chickens themselves and better,’ she added to herself in a mutter of indignation. ‘A fool that Juggy came into the world, and a fool she’ll stop in it as long as the head stays on her! What ails me to be letting myself be troubled with her, I wonder? Isn’t *one* fool enough for a decent woman to have on her hands at the same time?—yes, indeed, and more than enough! ’Tis the right *baulyore* I am with my easy-going ways, slaving and slaving from morning till night, and getting no thanks, only feeding them that never yet did a day’s work—nor couldn’t either, I believe, though you covered them with gold from head to foot, and pro-

mised them all Ireland in return for doing it. Whist! whist! whist, I tell you! *Will* you whist, I say?' she continued to the baby, who had by this time joined its plaintive howls to the other confusion of noises within and without the cabin. 'Whist this very minute! Arrah, will you hold the tongue of you then, and stop bawling? What! and will nothing else content ye? There, then, there, then; *now* be easy, and let me hear no more of you.' Then, as the baby's voice sank into a chuckle and murmur of content, 'Weary on you, one and all, for torments! my life's destroyed amongst you, late and early! Never a day's peace or quiet upon this earth, God knows!'

'Dada, my foot's sore! There's a big thorn sticking out of the top of it!' suddenly exclaimed the youngest child but two, a small, red-headed, lively creature called Norah, its father's chief favourite, who was sleeping

in an obscure corner of the cabin along with a brother of about a year older.

‘Arrah, hush, my dote ! Be easy, now, there’s a good child, and don’t be crossing your mother !’ Pete answered apprehensively, creeping out of his own bed and feeling his way over in the darkness to where the child’s voice came from. ‘There, there ; go to sleep quick, acushla agus, and sure dada will look for the ugly devil of a thorn in the morning and pull it out, never fear,’ he whispered soothingly, whereupon the child, satisfied by his assurance, put up her little face to be kissed and then settled down again, curling her little legs under her as a small drowsy bird curls itself into its own corner of the nest.

‘Man Above ! it *is* the terrible night it is, and no mistake !’ Pete added to himself in a tone of apprehension, looking round him with a terrified glance as a wilder gust than

ever swept down the chimney, rattling the ill-fitting woodwork, once more filling the cabin with white ashes, and threatening to bring the whole crazy construction about their ears.

‘Wild weather! God save all mariners upon the sea, far and near, this night, amen!’ muttered old Durane from his own corner behind the door, the one most out of the draught, and partially protected also by the *corrag*, or screen of dry branches of furze and alder. He was only half awake, but the formula was so familiar that it rose unbidden to his lips even in his sleep.

‘True to you, father, the same, amen!’ dutifully responded his son, as he skipped back across the cabin and into his own lair, pulling the great coat which was his chief covering by night as well as by day close up to his chin.

‘Yerra! you’re the nice pair, the two

of you, talking and carrying on in the black heart of the night as if it was the broad middle of the day !' his wife exclaimed angrily. ' And I that have not had one taste of sleep yet, and my two arms broke with holding up the child ! I take the holy Mother of God to witness that 'tis enough to make any woman curse the hour she was born, let alone the day she ever laid her two eyes upon such a man—not to say he is a man at all, for he isn't, nor hasn't the spirit nor the courage nor the sense of a man, only clever at putting upon one that's too soft and easy ever to say a 'no' to him ! Yerra ! give him his bit and his sup and his bed, and his easy life, and 'tis all he wants. *Wurrah deelish ! Wurrah deelish !* 'tis the queer husband *I* have, anyhow ! God, He knows that, so He does !'

To all this, Pete the submissive made no reply, only rolled himself up into a ball, trying to get his feet out of the piercing draught,

a performance which, despite the shortness of his legs, he utterly failed to accomplish. By degrees the scolding voice died away for mere lack of anything to feed upon ; the baby, too, slept ; little red-headed Norah crept closer and closer to her brother, pushing him against another sister who lay just beyond, till the three became an indistinguishable mass of small mottled arms and legs. The old man had relapsed into the placid dreamless slumbers of old age. Up in the chicken-loft poor, much-abused Juggy Kelly lay, her troubles and stupidities alike forgotten, one fat arm, utterly bare of covering, hanging outside the thin coverlet, her mouth wide open, and deep snores heaving her capacious chest.

Thus, despite the blasts which unceasingly shook it, all the inmates of the cabin little by little fell asleep. In other cabins scattered over the face of the island the in-

habitants, too, slept, notwithstanding the storm, till, towards daybreak, the wind itself—sweeping over and over, and round and round its unprotected top ; playing mad pranks along the steep perpendicular cliffs ; rushing vociferously through the narrow fluted channels and fissures, in at one end, out at the other ; loosening the thin flakes of limestone and dropping them with a hollow or tinkling clatter upon the next ledge—producing, in short, every variety of sound of which that not very responsive musical instrument was capable—was the only thing left awake and astir upon Inishmaan.

CHAPTER IV

THE art of weaving is one that has been practised upon the Aran isles for a longer time than it is easy to reckon. It cannot, however, be said to have, so far, reached any very high point of perfection. At the time at which this story opened there were no fewer than four professional weavers upon Inishmaan. Dumb Denny O'Shaughnessy, however, had always been considered to stand at the top of his profession, especially as the maker of the thick yellowish-white flannel used by the women for their bodices and by the men for their entire suits. Dumb Denny had now been dead some months, but the weaving trade was still carried on by his nephew Teige, though

there were not wanting captious housewives ready to cry out that the stuff produced by him was of a very inferior quality to that produced by old Denny. Changes, no matter of what sort or from what cause, are naturally condemned in such places as Inishmaan.

Grania had for some time back been intending to get Honor the materials for a new bed-gown, the only garment the poor woman now ever needed. Honor herself had deprecated the expense, declaring that the old one did well enough, though her elbows had long been through the sleeves—a fact not to be concealed whenever her old striped shawl, the only other garment she wore, fell back and left them exposed. Patches might perhaps have been fitted to them, but unfortunately Grania's various accomplishments did not include any very intimate acquaintance with a needle, her hands being much more at home with an oar or a pitch-fork. Honor, for an Aranite,

had been a fairly neat worker in her day, but that day was long past. In any case, new flannel Grania was determined to get, and when she had set her mind resolutely upon anything it was not likely to be long delayed.

A few days later, therefore, she set off for the O'Shaughnessy cabin to give the order to Teige, first driving 'Moonyeen' down to enjoy an hour's illicit feeding upon the bent-grass on the seashore. This small act of habitual larceny accomplished, she followed the level platform of rock till she reached the corner of the island, which brought her opposite to the little spit or isthmus by means of which the islet upon which the O'Shaughnessys' cabin stood joined on to its larger neighbour.

The weather was as bad as ever. Though it was now mid-May the day felt like March. An ill-conditioned blast—easterly rather than westerly—seemed to be waiting for the passer-

by at every corner. As she walked along the prospect was enough to set even native teeth on edge. In every direction spread the eternal grey sheets of rock, broken into fissures, battered by the storms, half melted under dissolving torrents of rain, their few patches of greenery shrunk away into the fissures for warmth and safety. Beyond lay the unvarying sweep of grey sea, or of land almost as cheerless. Overhead the same eternal cloud-processions. No clear sky anywhere. On they went, those clouds ; hurrying endlessly ; grey, shapeless masses entangled in one another ; clutching at one another with bodiless fingers, rolling away into the distance for ever and ever ; always going on, and yet never gone.

Especially was the wind cold and boisterous upon the narrow tongue of rock that linked the O'Shaughnessys' territory to the rest of the world. It seemed to

be literally sweeping in from all sides at once as Grania made her way across, avoiding as far as possible the oily coils of seaweed strewn over it, and, having reached the other side, clambered up the short steep bit of cliff which intervened between it and the cabin.

The door stood wide open, so that before she reached it she could see right through the cabin and out to the sea upon the other side. There were two windows, one on the same side as the door, looking south towards Inishmaan, the other looking northward. It was through this one that the grey light of the sea lying below came so distinctly, shining upon the floor and walls with something of the cold sheen and glitter of a sea-cave. Between the two windows stretched the loom, a rickety structure of indistinguishable hue, its beams half rotten, and bent and warped with time, the very cords on which the work in progress

was stretched being so worn and old that it seemed impossible they could continue to serve their purpose much longer. In place, too, of a metal sustainer a small bar of wood held up the work in progress—in the present case a piece of the usual whitish flannel of the island, the same that Grania had herself come to order.

Teige O'Shaughnessy was sitting bent double over his work, but he suddenly lifted his head, and started erect with a look of sheepish joy when he saw his visitor.

Poor Teige! He was not much less ill-favoured now than he had been six years earlier. On the contrary, a fall which he had had while puffin-hunting had resulted in a lameness which, though it did not hinder him from walking, made it painful to him. As Teige the *boccach*, or cripple, he was known all over the islands, where his freckled face, red hair, and halting gait

was a familiar object in every cabin, as he came and went with his bundles of flannel and coarse homespun friezes.

Standing behind his loom, whose beams and pulleys filled nearly the whole interior of the cabin, his poor, ugly face looked up at his visitor from under its red thatch with a peculiarly wistful expression, an expression not often seen on a man's face, very often upon that of some affectionate and rather unusually ill-used dog. Yet Grania had never ill-used Teige O'Shaughnessy. At least, had she? The question is not so easily answered as may at first sight seem. Given a woman with a larger share of plain human affection than she can conveniently dispose of—an impatient woman, hot tempered and vehement—let her have given away that affection where it is, to say the least, indifferently responded to; let her have someone else at hand to whom she is as the sun, moon, and stars shining in their glory—

as wonderful and hardly less unapproachable—what sort of treatment is she likely to mete out to that person? The experience of larger places than Inishmaan may be taken to supply the answer!

Grania's own impression, had she been asked, was that she was very good indeed to Teige O'Shaughnessy—now. She allowed him, that is to say, to do a multitude of odd jobs for her that she would never for an instant have dreamt of troubling Murdough with. When Honor had been well enough, for instance, it had been his office to help row the two sisters over to Aranmore to mass upon a Sunday morning, one for which he was well fitted, as he was as expert in the management of a curragh as she was herself, though his lameness made him less serviceable in other tasks, such as digging, or carrying heavy loads up hill.

A patient, hard-working, poor *boccach*, that

everyone admitted him to be—admitted it with the contempt which such grovelling qualities naturally awaken in Ireland. Indoors, especially, his handiness was really degrading. The earthen floor of the cabin was actually reported to be swept by him, not once a month, but every morning before he settled down to his day's work. The two tiny-paned windows were both extraordinarily clean, and the glass literally whole, so that the cabin was an exceptionally light one, in spite of its space being almost wholly blocked up by the loom and its various appurtenances.

To anyone entering at that moment, a first glance would have revealed no figure but that of the weaver himself. As Grania advanced into the cabin, however, an odd-looking, little, doubled-up, red object rose from a corner of the hearth where it had been squatting, and came towards her, making

queer bobs, ducks, and uncanny grimaces as it did so.

This was deaf and dumb Biddy O'Shaughnessy, twin sister to the man lately dead. Biddy had always been reckoned ‘queer’ upon Inishmaan, and her infirmity had naturally tended to cut her off from her fellows. She was also said to be malicious, though how a creature so helpless could be supposed to have the means of injuring anyone, it was hard to say. Whatever affection she had to give had certainly all been concentrated upon her twin-brother, and, since his death, she had grown more elf-like and uncanny than ever, as if the one tie that linked her to humanity had now been broken. She was asserted by her neighbours to detest her nephew Teige, though for this assertion also there was probably only the wildest surmise to go upon, and certainly Teige had never shown any signs of being aware of the fact himself.

Upon Grania the old woman's presence had always produced a distinctly unpleasant impression—not exactly of fear, not exactly of repulsion, but of something not very far removed from both. She had never got over that all but insane access of terror which the sight of the two old twins had inspired in her on the evening when, as the reader will remember, she had peeped in as a child at the cabin-window, and then torn madly home in consternation to Honor. Biddy was known, too, to have the power of seeing the ‘gentry,’ namely, the *shee* or *sidh*—beings who creep out from every mouse-hole and from behind every rafter the minute a family has gone to sleep, but which few people have the power of seeing and actually holding communication with. Of these privileged few, Biddy O'Shaughnessy was universally held to be one.

After uttering sundry queer clacking

noises, something like the notes of a bald coot, which were intended to serve as greetings, the old woman seemed to forget her visitor, going back to her former place and squatting down again beside the fire. Meanwhile Grania proceeded to explain to Teige the sort of flannel she wanted to have for Honor, handing him at the same time a mass of wool which had been spun by themselves several winters before. The piece of flannel then upon the loom being of the same character, though coarser than the one she wanted, she took hold of it to show Teige how she wished it to be different, explaining that she wanted Honor to have the warmest and softest flannel possible. Poor Honor! she was so thin that everything fretted her skin and hurt her nowadays.

While they stood there talking the cold light reflected off the sea shone upon their two heads bent over the loom, Grania's dark

one, from which her shawl had dropped, and Teige's caroty poll, the fiery redness of which was only modified by the dust that had gathered thickly on it in the course of his day's work. The tide rose higher and higher, wetting the rocks and stranded, half-dry seaweeds, curling round the small indentations, and shooting noisily upwards in long jets of spray. It seemed as if the little house on top must presently be overtaken and washed away by it. They had to raise their voices almost to a shout so as to hear one another above the tumult.

Old Biddy, vexed perhaps at being left out of the conference, presently began to move about, uttering the queer, disjointed grunts and croaks which were her chief contributions to conversation. First she chattered vehemently to herself; next, apparently, to someone or something sitting amongst the smouldering embers of the turf; next she began to stare at

the rafters overhead, nodding and blinking at them, as if some friendly or inquisitive face was peering down from between their interstices. After a while, growing tired of these entertainments, she crept over towards the loom, making her way in and out of its crazy woodwork with a deftness born of long practice. In this way she got by degrees to the other side, unobserved by the two absorbed over the discussion of the flannel. For a while she contented herself with gazing up at them, her wrinkled old monkey-face puckered into a variety of quaint grimaces—a wonderful old human gargoyle, beyond the imagination of even a Gothic carver adequately to reproduce. All at once a new notion seemed to seize her, and the next time the two heads approached one another, bending over the woof, Teige explaining something and Grania listening, she darted forward, and, with a sudden, impish clutch, caught at them and

held them tightly together, so that for a few seconds the two faces were forcibly pushed cheek to cheek, the total unexpectedness of the movement hindering either of them from resisting.

Grania was the first to pull herself away, and she did it furiously. The very touch of the old creature was like the touch of a toad or a spider to her—it sent a shiver of disgust through her whole body. She turned angrily, her arm was up, she was about to strike. She stopped short, however, at sight of the crooked, diminutive body and grinning monkey-face before her. Old Biddy, on her side, bobbed, ducked, and chattered, blinking her eyes, a little frightened evidently, yet proud, too, and pleased by her own successful piece of mischief. Grania, thereupon, swept round upon Teige. *Someone* should be responsible—*someone* should be made to pay for

the insult! Teige was standing in the same place beside the loom, his face red as a lobster, as red as his hair, but his eyes shining—shining as they had probably never shone in his life before. The poor, ill-favoured *boccach* was for the moment transfigured. Grania stared at him in sheer astonishment. What did he mean? What was he staring at? What on earth possessed him? She felt confused and startled. Something was passing through her, a sudden impression, she did not as yet know what it was, but it was something new—something at once new and disturbing—something that meant—What, she asked herself confusedly, *did* it mean?

With a sudden, angry clutch she swept up her shawl which was lying on the floor, and, without another word, ran out of the cabin down the steep bit of pathway which led to the narrow causeway, now

narrower than ever from the fast encroaching tide.

Lame as he was, Teige, being nearer to the door, contrived to scramble after her, and caught her up just as she reached the other side.

‘Auch, Grania ! Grania O’Malley !—’tisn’t angry you’d be with one who hasn’t the sense of life in her at all, at all ? ’ he cried deprecatingly—‘a creature that can’t speak with her tongue, nor hear with her ears, nor understand, nor a thing ! What is she but a poor old lost one out and out, old Biddy, God help her ! Sure, Grania O’Malley, ’tisn’t yourself would turn upon such a one as that ? Arrah, I know you wouldn’t.’

But Grania was not to be reasoned with. She pulled her hand furiously away, almost pushing him down the rocks in her anger. What did he mean by trying to stop her ? what did he mean by

staring at her? what did he mean by——? Had they all gone mad to-day—herself into the bargain? Why did he look at her like that?—look at her as no one else had ever—why did he—why did she——? Her head spun round; she hurried on.

It was like an idea dropped out of another world, a world remote from Inishmaan and Aran altogether. It set her whole frame in a whirl, not as regards Teige—he was a chip, a straw, nothing—but because it chimed in with something—a tune, a notion—she could not tell what, which had often sung through her brain and tingled in her ears, been heard now and then for a moment, sometimes almost distinctly, then lost, then heard again. What was it? What was the name of that tune? Was it inside herself or outside, or where was it?

Scrambling over the rocks, she hurried on, forgetting in her excitement to fetch

home Moonyeen, forgetting the flannel, forgetting everything but this new voice, buzzing, buzzing unceasingly in her ears. Presently she found that she had overshot the path by a considerable distance, so stopped a minute, perplexed and giddy, close to the edge of the cliff. Below her lay the coose where Murdough kept his curragh, and beyond it she could see the little old villa, standing upon its narrow green platform, backed up behind and at the side with rocks. On a nearer view it would have been seen to have grown even more tumbledown than when we saw it last; its rusty ironwork still more rusty, and still more fantastic in its decrepitude. At this distance, however, it was practically unchanged, and, ruined as it was, it shed an air of classic dignity, of half-effaced importance and prosperity upon the spot where it stood, such as no other spot on Inishmaan certainly boasted.

Grania stood for a moment on the edge of the cliff, staring down at it; her black brows almost meeting in the intensity of her gaze, her arms locked one over the other on her chest, her face working. Suddenly she turned with a gesture of impatience, and looked away from it towards the other side, the side where there was no villa, and where there was nothing to be seen, nothing, that is, but the sea and the bare sea-washed sheets of limestone. Ledge above ledge, layer above layer, these last rose; straight, horizontal, clean cut as if laid by some builder's hands, a mass of crude, uncompromising masonry. Under that heavy, lowering sky it was about as cold and as menacing a prospect as could well be imagined—a prospect, too, that had a suggestion somehow about it of cruelty. ‘Look well at me,’ it seemed to say, ‘you have only to choose. Life up there on those stones! death down

here upon these—there, you see, where the surf is licking the mussels! Choose—choose carefully—take your time—only choose!'

No one was in sight, not even a cow, only a few seagulls overhead, and with a quick impulse, born of her own hurrying thoughts, the girl suddenly flung up her arms, uttering at the same time a low cry, half of anger, half of sheer brain-tormenting perplexity. It was like the cry of some dumb creature, vague, inarticulate, full of uncomprehended pain, and of still less comprehended dissatisfaction. She could not have explained why she did it, what she meant by it, or what was amiss. Nothing had happened. She was in no trouble, everything was the same as usual; only—only—

It relieved, yet it startled her. She looked round, fearing to have been overheard. A tuft of nodding yellow tansy looked up with an air of impudent intelligence into her face.

Whatever its thoughts may have been, however, it kept them to itself, and merely nodded the harder.

With another shamefaced glance around, Grania turned and made her way, this time straight home to the cabin where Honor was waiting for her, and where she had to listen to a long, tender remonstrance upon the folly of wasting money upon clothes for the likes of her. What was the good of it at all, at all? Was it for the burying she wanted them? Didn't everyone know it was a sin and a shame to be buying clothes for people that could never live to wear them out? Wickedness, so it was, God knew!—no better. Grania listened to all this silently, then equally silently went about her work. All day she experienced a startled sort of feeling. Something seemed to have happened. And yet no — upon second thoughts she remembered nothing had hap-

pened. It was as if something had got inside herself, or into the air—she could not tell where. That tune ; what was it ? who had sung it to her ? what was its name ? what did it all mean ? By degrees, however, the impression began to pass away, till by bed-time it had almost gone.

As for Teige O'Shaughnessy he remained at least ten minutes standing upon the same spot where they had parted, gazing with the same air of sheepish remonstrance at the piece of rock where he had seen her last. Then, with a grunt and a look of perplexity, he returned, scratching his carroty head, to the cabin, and set to work again upon the piece of flannel stretched upon the loom. The tide continued to rise ; the little peninsula was presently converted into an island ; he and old Biddy were as effectually cut off from the rest of Inishmaan as though an ocean had rolled between them and it. She

was back now in her usual place beside the chimney, her eyes fixed with a look of eager, unblinking fascination upon a particular spot amongst the rafters. All at once she sprang up, made a dart forward, and caught at something, small enough, apparently, to be contained in one hand, then retreated, gibbering and chuckling, to her stool again, as delighted evidently as a child that has captured a butterfly. Cautiously she opened finger after finger, at last the whole hand ; peeped round each portion of it separately, examined front, back, and sides, every part of it, her wrinkled old face twisted into an expression first of high glee, next of incredulity. Finally, with a grimace of sudden disappointment and malice, she turned, shaking her fist and chattering her teeth furiously, in the direction of her nephew, evidently regarding him as in some way or other responsible for the disappointment.

CHAPTER V

AT last the spell which had so long brooded over the islands was broken! The weather changed. The rain ceased—temporarily at any rate. A glimmer of sunshine even broke out, and sent dimpling, pinkish reflections one after the other along the sides of the little cooses, which for months had known no colours but Indian ink and lamp-black. The rock pools themselves awoke, the oozy things that tenant them seeming to feel the warm impulsion from above, expanding their snaky tentacles and turning their ever-gaping, hungry, jelly-like mouths towards the sunlight.

Down at the old church of Cill-Cananach

the spring had asserted itself yet more undeniably. The rocks there were so worn and thinned away as hardly to be visible at all, and over them the sands had spread in a succession of humps and hollows. These humps and hollows were full of shells—sea shells and land shells, tossed together in friendly companionship. You might have picked out of them a winkle or a limpet, and the next minute the yellow-banded cast-off house of a common snail. Bare it was, always must be bare ; nevertheless, there was a suggestion of something warmer, of something less austere and grim than those wind-infested shores often gave. Tufts of maiden-hair hung confidently over the ledges, the rare yellow rock-rose, which, by some odd caprice, finds its home here and here only, showed at intervals its brilliant brown-spotted face, while everywhere the thyme, spread about in great purple masses, gave out its sweet wild smell.

Grania O'Malley, more than most others, rejoiced in this sudden escape from winter into something like a realisation of summer. She had been living for some time back in a sort of tomb—an open-air one, but still a tomb. Now a change had come, and the youth in her rose to it. Murdough Blake, too, grew suddenly more companionable. He actually came of his own accord, and proposed to aid her in some of her accustomed tasks, and they accordingly resumed their nightly occupation of feeding the kelp fire—she, that is to say, feeding it, he feeding her ears and his own upon the usual gorgeous, if windy, diet of achievements to be performed by himself at some remote, as yet undiscovered, date.

One afternoon she started about four o'clock towards an old 'clochaun,' or bee-hive cell, the only variation of architecture Inishmaan boasts, setting aside raths, cabins,

ruined churches, and the solitary Italianised villa upon the east shore. She had hoped Murdough might have met her there, he having promised to do so. There was no sign of him, however, so she set to work without loss of time, having brought a sickle for the purpose, and was soon piling a heap of grass upon the flattest of the neighbouring slabs.

This ‘clochaun’—last of a once, doubtless, numerous kindred—was still reasonably intact, though its windows were all but closed, partly from the slipping of the stones above them, partly from the great bosses of lichen and strong-growing sea-thrift which choked their openings. With its roof of over-lapping stones, rounded walls, and floor of earth mixed with sand and shells, it had far more the aspect of some queerly constructed bird’s-nest, some erratically disposed beast’s lair, than anything

conceivable as having ever been inhabited by the human biped. At this date, too, it was even less like a human abode than when some skin-clad sixth-century monk inhabited it, for from floor below to roof above it was covered with a dense growth of tall, feathery-looking grass, which sprouted in tufts on either side, and waved in a dense triumphal crop over the small domed summit.

Lying, as it did, within the track over which the O'Malley sisters reigned, they naturally had the right of grazing there, and it was this that had brought Grania out that afternoon, sickle in hand, to clear the walls of their harvest, and carry it home to the calf, whose appetite was a sort of raging lion, never to be appeased, and who regarded a diet largely made up of maiden-hair ferns, red-crane's-foot, campions, white saxifrages, and such-like flowery provender with natural, if unæsthetic, contempt.

She waited a while after clearing the ‘clochaun’ of its grass to give Murdough a chance of appearing. Then, as there were no signs of him, and the afternoon was still early, it occurred to her, before saddling herself with her load, that she would go down to the villa, which was no great distance, and see if he was there—a contingency which, from her acquaintanceship with his habits, she had reason to regard as far from improbable.

She did not find him, but there were signs of his having been there not long before, and of his having had company, too—company that, in her opinion, he would have been much better without. A still picturesque, if dilapidated, villa without, it had gradually grown into the likeness of a mere dirty, disreputable little ‘shebeen-shop’ inside. The floor was filthy with accumulated mud, brought in on many pairs of pampooties and

never cleared away. Some cracked glasses, a couple of black bottles with jagged, dangerous-looking necks, and several old tin pannikins stood heaped together upon a sort of ledge which served as a table. There was a barrel, too, half hidden behind some cut furze-bushes in a remote corner. The existence of this barrel was supposed to be a profound secret, but secrets are ill kept in places like Inishmaan, and Grania, like everyone else, knew perfectly well that a barrel of illicit whisky had been put ashore there some three weeks before. How much of that whisky was there left now? she wondered.

She had made her way in by a back window, the secret of opening which Murdough had long ago shown her, and now looked round her with a sensation of intense disgust. Like most Irishwomen of her class—at all events till age, sympathy,

possibly till mere abounding patience and pity break them in—this was to her the sin of sins ; the sin that meant starvation, clamorous children, misery of all sorts, shame and the horrors of the workhouse at no very remote future. To-day, too, she was already vexed and disappointed, and therefore less inclined than usual to be tolerant.

‘It is the fool he is ! My God ! it is the fool !’ she muttered fiercely, as she looked about her. ‘What ails him, then, at all, at all?—soaking ! soaking ! soaking ! What ails them all, my God ? Weary upon that drink, but it is the curse of the world !’

She went over to the barrel, and shook it viciously, not having anything else at hand to shake. It was nearly empty, for she could hear what little liquor was left splashing about at the very bottom. Had it been full, she would, perhaps, in her wrath, have dragged it out, stove in the bottom and let

the stuff run away into the sea. As it was, it did not seem worth while. She came out again, a scowl upon her face, an angry red light shining in her eyes ; dropped the window into its place ; climbed the hill with swift, wrathful steps, and returned to the ‘ clochaun ’ and her heap of grass. Here, having collected together the latter with a sort of fierce energy, she made it into an enormous stack, got the rope round it, and, having hoisted it up by main force upon her back, turned to go homeward.

As she was slowly mounting from the third to the fourth ledge she saw a figure sitting alone upon a large boulder close to the edge of the track, and perceived, upon coming nearer, that it was old Durane, who was sunning himself in the unaccustomed warmth, enjoying a pipe and the luxury of being free from even the distant sounds of his daughter-in-law’s tongue.

Everyone upon Inishmaan regarded it as a high privilege to get old Durane to talk, for he was a stately and reticent old personage, as has been seen, quite satisfied with being excellent company to himself, and not tormented, as most of us are, by any burning desire of being recognised as good company by others as well. Where he was sitting was within the edge of the O'Malleys' territory, and as Grania with her towering load came up the track he looked up and, perhaps, in recognition of that fact, gave her a civil good-day, with a wave of his hand, and a *Banaght lath!* *Banaght lath!*—an old-fashioned mode of salutation, already almost completely gone out of fashion.

A sudden impulse came over the girl—an unusual one with her, for she was not gregarious—an impulse to stop a minute and have a chat with the old fellow, the

rather that the cord was cutting her shoulder badly, and a rest, therefore, would not be unwelcome.

‘It is down at the old house by the sea—the gentlefolks’ house as they call it—I have been, Mr. Durane, sir,’ she observed in a tone of suitable respect, as she sat down beside him on the great smooth top of the boulder. ‘And it is a bad way it is getting into, too—a very bad way, so it is.’ Then, after a minute—‘Was it ever as it was in the old time, when the quality was living upon Inishmaan, that you remember it?’ she went on in rather a hesitating tone, her first conversational venture not having, so far, met with any particular encouragement on the part of her neighbour.

Old Durane shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, looked seaward, spat politely behind him into a fissure, then turned a bright little puckered eye upon her

as if to ask her what she was driving at, and presently took up his parable.

'Is it about Mr. Lynch Bodkin you are asking me, my good girl, if I remember him? Oh, but yes, I do remember him very well; why not? why not? He was a great man, and a good man, Mr. Lynch Bodkin—a *very* good man! He would have ten, yes, and twelve gentlemen over from Galway or Round'stown at one time to dine with him, and it is the door of the house he would lock if they wanted to go away early, so he would. "No man has ever left my table till I choose, and no man ever shall," he would say. "Is it to shame me you would be after, and in my own house, too? There is the red wine, and there is the white wine for you, and, if that will not do, there is the whisky wine too, and you may take your choice, gentlemen!" that is what he would say. Oh! a very good man he was, Mr. Lynch Bodkin,

very. There are no such gentlemen left now —no, none at all.'

Grania listened with profound attention. It all seemed rather odd somehow. In what, she wondered, did Mr. Lynch Bodkin's particular goodness consist?

'And was it always drunk the gentleman would be, and the other gentlemen that were with him, too?' she inquired in a tone of perfect gravity.

'Drunk? but he was not drunk at all! —never to say drunk!' old Durane answered indignantly. 'And for respect, I would have you to know, my good girl, that there was not a gentleman in all Galway—no, nor in Mayo either, nor in the whole of Connaught —that was so much thought of as Mr. Lynch Bodkin! It was down there by the sea yonder he would hold his courts, so he would, for it was he that gave all the justice to Inishmaan—yes, and to the

other islands as well. And it would have to be upon a fine day, because it would be on the outside of his house that he would hold the court always—yes, indeed, outside of it, down there on the rocks by the sea that it would be held. And if it was not a very fine day, he would just go out of the door and look up at the sky, and say to the people, “Come again to-morrow, boys!” and they would all go away. Then next day, perhaps, they would come. Oh! but it was a fine sight, I can tell you, to see his honour sitting there in a great gold armchair that would be brought out of the house, out from his own parlour, and put upon the rocks yonder! There would be, perhaps, six or seven people brought up for him to judge at once, and sometimes his honour would put the hand-cuffs on them himself, so he would, for it was in his own house he kept the hand-cuffs always. And if it was any-

thing very bad, oh ! very bad indeed they had done, then it was to the “Continent” over beyond there he would send them—into Galway to the jail—because there has never been any jail on Aran.’

‘And would they go into the jail when he sent them ? ’ Grania inquired with some surprise.

‘Is it go? Indeed and it is they that *must* go. My God! yes, and find the boat to go in, too, so they must, and pay for that boat themselves, so they must! It was just a small bit of writing his honour would be good enough to give them, that was all, and they must show it at the jail-door in Galway when they went in. Go? I do not think there was a man or a woman on Inishmaan, no, nor on all Aran, nor anywhere near it, that would not have gone to jail, or anywhere else, if his honour, Mr. Lynch Bodkin, had sent him! A great man, and a very

good man too, Mr. Lynch Bodkin ! There are no such quality now.'

Old Durane paused, lost apparently in pleasurable retrospection.

'But it is back I must be getting,' he added presently, rising with sudden briskness from his seat. 'And you, too, my fine girl, with your bundle of grass on your back ! Gorra ! but it is some young man that should be carrying it for you, and if I was twenty years younger I would not see you so loaded—so I would not. And how is that good woman your sister ? No better ? *Tchah ! tchah !* that is bad ! It is not long you will be keeping her with you, I am afraid ! Well, well, it is in God's hands, and it is the best sort He will have for Himself, and small blame to Him for that, either—no, indeed ; small blame to Him ! You will tell her that I was asking after her, for it is the sick people that like to hear and know every-

thing that goes on. When my wife was such a long time dying, it was not a cat kitted in all Inishmaan but she must know about it the first—yes, indeed, always—always the very first! But I will wish you a good-day now, my fine girl; I will wish you a very good-day.' And old Durane, who soon tired of any company, except his own, toddled away with a wave of his ragged caubeen that would have done honour to an ambassador.

Grania, too, shouldered her load again after a minute and went ploddingly on her way home. She felt less angry, somehow, since she had talked to this old philosopher, though she could not have explained why. It seemed as if some voice of the past had got between her and her wrath. Would it have been any different in those old times she wondered, or was it always the same? Always? always?

She was no sooner out of sight and round the corner of the next rock than old Durane sat down again, stretching his long thin legs luxuriously before him, so as to let the warm light which played over the top of the ridge reach them. He was not really in any hurry to get home. Rosha and her shrill rasping voice were joys that would keep. He loved the sunshine beyond everything, though he got it so seldom, and on fine days, deserting the cabin, deserting even his favourite stony arm-chair, would seek out some sheltered cleft of the rocks or hollow amongst the furze, and sit there hour after hour, turning the pebbles in front of him about with his stick, and smiling slowly to himself, sometimes muttering over and over some cabalistic word—a word which, for the moment, had the effect of recreating for him the past, one which, even to himself, had grown almost spectrally remote, so dim and far away was it. A

queer old ragged Ulysses this, whose Ithaea was that solitary islet set in the bleak and inhospitable Atlantic! Far out of sight, and rarely now to be stirred by anything modern, lay hidden away in the recesses of that old brain of his a whole phantasmagoria of recollections, beliefs, prejudices, traditions; bits of a bygone feudal world, with all its habits and customs; bits of a hardly more remote and forgotten legendary world; the world of the primitive Celt—a big, elemental world this, glorious with the light of a still unspoiled future—fragments of fifty creeds, fragments of a hundred modes of thought, all dead enough, Heaven knows, yet alive for the moment under that weather-beaten old caubeen of his. This peculiarly Irish form of brain-endowment has never yet found expression in art—never, so far as can be judged by symptoms, is in the least likely to do so—but it has from time im-

memorial served as the source of a good deal of odd discounted entertainment to its possessors, and that, if not the same thing, is perhaps as good a one—possibly even better.

CHAPTER VI

GREGORY SOUND, Foul Sound, South Sound, every sound around the three islands was full of mackerel.

For several days all the available curraghs belonging to Inishmaan, and the two other islands as well, had been out after them the whole day long. The Aran folk are not particularly expert fishermen, and their share of the herring fishery, the chief take of the year, is apt to be a meagre one. They have neither the tackle nor the hereditary skill of the Galway Claddagh men —though even these fish less and worse than their fathers did, and let the lion's share

of the yearly spoil fall into the hands of strangers. As for the once famous “sun-fishing,” it has become a myth: the fish are scarcer, but even when they do appear hardly an attempt is made to secure them.

Grania O’Malley and Murdough Blake were out alone together in a curragh in the South Sound. They were fishing at a distance of several miles from their own island, beyond the least of the three islands, Inisheer, and between it and the opposite coast of Clare. The sun shone brightly, the sea was almost a dead calm, yet the great green rollers kept their boat incessantly on the move—slowly, slowly up one side of a smooth green glassy ridge; then slowly, slowly down the other side—down, down, down, sleepily, quietly, all but imperceptibly, into the hollow of the next glassy valley; then up, up, up, to the very top of the one beyond.

Despite this movement the sea had the

effect of seeming to have a film of glass laid over it, so unbroken was its surface. You might have traced the same roller which had just lifted their own boat's keel miles upon miles away, till it finally broke against the Hag's Head or got lost somewhere in the direction of Miltown Malbay. Everywhere the black bows of other currahs peered up mysteriously, looking like the heads of walruses, dudongs, or some such sea-habitants ; now visible above the shining surface ; now lost to sight ; then suddenly reappearing again. It seemed as if they were amusing themselves by some warm-weather game of floating and diving.

Summer had come at last, there was no doubt of that fact ! As Murdough and Grania walked down to the boat the air had been full of all manner of alluring promises. The year had at last awakened, and even those small epitomes of desolation, their own islands,

had caught the infection, their usual ascetic aspect having given way to-day to one of quite comparative frolicsomeness—the sort of frolicsomeness suggestive of a monk or a nun upon an unwonted holiday. At the point where they had got into the curragh the sand was one mass of silene, spreading its reticulated net in all directions. Across this green net the still young rays of the sun had struck, lighting up the thin long stems and white pendulous flower-heads, which sprang up again every time they were trodden down, nodding, and nodding frantically, in breezy, reckless defiance of any such accidents.

Even out here, in the middle of the bay, there was an extraordinary sense of lightness—a sense of warmth, too, of gaiety and elation. The distant headlands, generally swathed to the very feet in clouds, wore to-day an air of quite Italian-like distinctness, joined to a not at all Italian-like sense of remoteness and distance.

It was a day of days, in short! A day to write up in red chalk; a day to remember for years; not a day, alas! likely soon to recur again.

Grania felt foolishly happy. Not for a long time, not since she had first known for certain that Honor must die, hardly since she and Murdough had been children together, had she felt so light, so rid of all tormenting thoughts, thoughts all the worse and more tormenting from their being so imperfectly understood. Her heart seemed to leap and bound under her old patched bodice, though she sat erect and decorously upon her narrow thwart, watching the line as if no other thought for her existed in the whole world. Inside that old bodice, however, a whole dance of glad young fancies were flitting to and fro and up and down. The world was good, after all, she thought—good! good! good!—at least *sometimes!*

Mackerel-fishing is, fortunately, not a business of too strenuous a nature to be enjoyable. Your line bobs easily and pleasantly along the surface in the wake of your boat. Your bait—a shining object of some sort, more often than not a scrap of the skin of the first victim—is artfully attached, not to the killing hook, but to the one immediately above it. At this the fish snaps—why, no fisherman can tell you—is caught by the hook below, pulled in, tossed to the bottom of the boat, your line is out again, and so the game goes merrily on—merrily for all save the mackerel, whose opinion naturally does not count for much one way or other.

Grania and Murdough were both expert fishers. She, if anything, was the more expert of the two, and her hand the quickest to draw in the line at the right moment. Her attention, too, never varied—in appearance

—from the business in hand, whereas his was wont to be afloat over the whole surrounding earth, sea, sky, and universe at large. His powers of concentration were not, it is to be feared, improving. It is conceivable that many successive evenings devoted to the society of Shan Daly, Paddy O'Toole, Kit Rafferty—otherwise ‘Kit the Rake’—also to that of the big barrel hidden away under the furze-bushes in the old villa, are not exactly conducive to a young man’s steadiness of hand or his business-like habits. So far, happily, this one’s natural good looks, and the all but absolutely open-air life he led, had kept him from the prematurely sodden air of the young topers of our towns. Still, there were signs, slight but significant, pointing in one direction—pointing grimly towards a brink which, once crossed, there is seldom, if ever, any crossing back again.

To-day, however, these signs were hap-

pily in abeyance. His eye was bright, his skin clear, the voluble superabounding Gaelic ran as nimbly as ever over his tongue; his shoulders squared themselves as broadly as ever against the soft green glassiness behind him; he looked as vigorous and as comely a specimen of youthful peasant manhood as heart of maiden sweetheart could desire.

On they floated—easily, buoyantly. Now and then one or other would give a few strokes of the oar, so as to keep the curragh moving and hinder it from turning round. The high-piled, somewhat picturesque point of Inisheer was from this position the nearest land in sight. Over it they could see the crenelated top of O'Brien's castle, which rises incongruously out of the middle of an ancient rath, a rath so ancient that its origin is lost in the clouds, and even tradition refuses to find a name for

it, so that archaeology has to put up regretfully with a blank in its records. Farther on three small grey cabins stood out, the stones in their walls distinguishable separately even at this distance; beyond these again twinkled a tiny, weed-covered lake with a crooked cross beside it; then three or four big monumental stones running in a zigzag line up one side of a narrow boheen; then some more grey cabins, gathered in a little cluster; then a few stunted, dilapidated thorn-trees, bent double by the gales; then the broken-down gable-end of a church, and then the sea again.

‘Is it to Galway those will be going, I wonder?’ Grania asked presently, pointing to a curragh which three men were just lifting over a little half-moon of sand, preparatory to launching it.

‘No, it will not be to Galway, Grania O’Malley, they will be going—not to Galway

at all,' Murdough answered, turning round to watch them and speaking eagerly. 'It is out to sea they will be going—to the real Old Sea beyond! That one there is Malachy Flaherty—the big man with the chin beard—and that is Pat Flaherty in the middle, and the little one yonder, with the red round his waist, is Macdara Flaherty. It is all Flaherties they are, mostly, on Inisheer; yes, and it is all pilots mostly they are, too. Oh, but it is a good business, the piloting business!—my faith and word yes, a very good, fine business, I can tell you, Grania O'Malley! It is three pounds English, not a penny less, they will make sometimes in one afternoon—three pounds and more too! Macdara Flaherty, he has told me himself he did often make that when he would be out alone by himself. Macdara Flaherty! think of that! And who is Macdara Flaherty, I should like to know, that he should get three pounds?

Just a poor little pinkeen of a fellow, not up to my shoulder! Glory be to God! but it is a good grand business, the piloting business, and if I had been reared a pilot it is much money I should have made by this time, yes indeed, and put by too, so I should. It was a very great shame of my father and of my mother that they did not bring me up to the piloting business, so it was! A big, black, burning shame of the two of them !'

Grania listened with a sort of sleepy satisfaction. Of late Murdough's gorgeous visions of what, under other and totally different circumstances, he would have done and achieved had been less a pleasure to her than might have been expected. It is conceivable that they jarred a little too much with the actual reality. To-day, however, her mood was so placid that nothing seemed to touch it. She went on, nevertheless, with her fishing. That, at least, was wonderfully

good. The mackerel kept rushing insanely at the bits of dancing, glittering stuff which lured them; snapping at them so idiotically and so continuously that already quite a big pile lay at the bottom of the boat.

After fishing along the coast of Inisheer they drifted in the afternoon some little distance southwards with the tide, until it carried them nearly opposite to the cliffs of Moher. They could see the huge pale-grey boundary wall, with all the joints and scars on its face and the white fringe of water at its feet. Then, when the tide had again turned, they followed it slowly back, till they had once more come to nearly the same spot they had occupied in the morning.

As the dusk came on Grania's contented mood seemed only to deepen and to grow more conscious. A vague, diffused enjoyment filled her veins. She wished for nothing, hoped for nothing, imagined

nothing, only to go on and on as they were doing at present—she and Murdough always together, no one else near them—on and on and on, for ever, and ever, and ever. It was like one of her old childish visions come true.

A soft wind blew towards them from the Atlantic, sweeping across their own three islands. You might have thought that, instead of that inhospitable waste of saltiness, some region of warmth, fertility, and greenness lay out there in the dim and shadowy distance. The air appeared to be filled with soft scents; an all-pervading impression of fertility and growth, strong to headiness, seemed to envelope them as they sat there, one behind the other. Now and then a dog barked, or the far-off sound of voices came from one of the islands; otherwise, save the movements of the boat and the soft rush of the water around them, not a sound was to be heard. The warm air caressed Grania; a

sense of vague intoxication and happiness such as she had never before felt seemed to envelope her from head to foot. As it grew darker a quantity of phosphorescence began to play about upon the surface, dropping in tiny green rivulets from off their oars as they lifted them. It seemed to her as if the queer green glittering stuff was alive, and was winking at her ; as if it was telling her stories ; some of them old stories, but others quite new—stories that she had certainly never heard or never understood before.

She looked at Murdough. They were nearly touching one another, though his back was to her. Beyond him everything was blurred and confused, but his shoulders in their yellowish flannel ‘baudeen’ stood out square and well-defined. A vague desire to speak to him filled her mind. She wanted it so much that it perplexed her, for what was there particularly to say to him

at the moment? She did not know, all she knew was that she *did* want it—wanted it to a degree that was almost painful, while at the same time something else seemed to stop her, to stand in the way, to forbid her speaking to him. It was all very queer! She could not tell what had come to herself that evening.

The most unconventional of all countries under the sun, Ireland has a few strict conventions of its own, and one of the strictest of those conventions was standing like a wall of brass right in her path at that moment. True, she and Murdough were betrothed—might be said to be as good as married—but what then? Even if they had been married, married a hundred times, convention stronger than anything else, the iron convention of their class, would have forbidden anything like open demonstrativeness from him to her, still more therefore from her to him. She knew this; knew it without arguing or thinking about it; would

not have dreamt of questioning it ; could not, in fact, have done so, for it was ground into the very marrow of her bones, was a part of the heritage, not of her race alone, but of her own particular half of that race. All the same, nature, too, was strong ; the witchery of the night was strong ; the whole combining circumstances of the moment were exceedingly, exceptionally strong. There was no resisting them entirely ; so, stopping for a moment in her leisurely rowing, she stretched out her hand and laid it lightly for a moment upon his shoulder, at the same time holding up the oar so as to let the shining particles run down the blade into the sea in a tiny green cascade.

‘ It is all on fire it seems to be, does it not, Murdoughleen ? ’ she said tremulously.

He started. ‘ My faith and word, yes, it does, Grania a veelish,’ he answered. ‘ It is very like fire—very. A man would think

that he might light his pipe by it; so he would! It is very strange; very!'

The intoxicating air had stolen, perhaps, a little into his veins also. And whether spontaneously or merely in mesmeric response to her touch upon his shoulder, he too stopped rowing, and turning a little backwards, rather to his own astonishment put his arm about her waist.

Grania blushed scarlet. Her head swam, but without a moment's hesitation she put her face up to his, and they kissed one another. It was a genuine lovers' kiss, their first, although they had been over a year engaged, a fact of which she was immediately and overwhelmingly conscious.

Profiting by the cessation of his labours, Murdough presently pulled out his pipe, lit it—though not by the phosphorescence—sucked at it for a few minutes, and, thus refreshed, embarked upon a new disquisition

upon the great advantages to be gained by being a pilot.

Yes, indeed, it was himself ought to have been one, so he ought, and if he had been a pilot, it is the best pilot upon the three islands he would have been—by God ! yes—the very best ! It was out beside the Brannock rocks—the farthest rocks of all—he would have stopped mostly, and stopped, and stopped, and stopped, no matter what storm might be blowing at the time, and waited until a ship came. And the very minute a ship came in sight—a real big ship, that is, from the East Indies, or, maybe, America, or, better still, California—then he would have rowed out to her all by himself. He would not have taken anyone with him, no, for he did not want to be sharing his money with anyone, but he would have rowed and rowed, out and out, till he got into the middle of the big Old Sea. And there he

would have waited till the ship came close up to him, and then it was up upon the deck of it he would have got—yes, indeed, up upon the deck. And it was the captain himself, and no other, that must have come to speak to him, for he would not have spoken a word to any other man, only to the captain himself. And when the captain came he would have asked if he knew the way up to the Galway quay, and if he knew every shoal and rock and sandbank there was in the bay. And he would have thrown back his head like that and laughed—yes, laughed out loud, he would, at the captain, for to go asking him such a foolish question. And he would have said that he did, and no man better, nor so well, not on all the islands, nor on the Continent, nor in Dublin itself— ‘And if you do not want me, and if you will not pay me my full big price, it is not I that will go with you, no, not one

half foot of me. And if I do not go with you, it is upon the rocks you will go this night, my fine captain, you and all your poor men—yes, indeed, upon the rocks this night, and be drowned every one of you—for there is no other man on Inisheer, no, nor on any of the islands, that dare bring you into Galway upon such a night, only myself alone. And I will not bring you in for less than my full price, so you need not think it. No, indeed, for why would I venture my life for nothing? Great King of Glory! that would be a foolish thing for any man to do—a *very* foolish thing! Is it for a fool you take me, my fine captain, with your gold lace upon your sleeves? Begorrah, if you do you are wrong, for I am no fool at all, so do not think it. Only I should be sorry for you and your poor men if they were all drowned, as they will be, God knows, this night, if you do not give me my full price!'

His voice went on and on, rising, falling,

then rising again, the guttural many-syllabled Gaelic flowing and flowing like a stream. Some belated cormorants came flying across the water from Aranmore, uttering dull croaks as they went. The heavy smoke of the kelp-fires trailed across the bay, and as the curragh passed through it, filled their nostrils with its sharp, briny scent, lying behind them as they passed like a bar of solid cotton. Sometimes, in the interest of his narrative, Murdough's voice rose to a shout, as he waved his arms in the air, shook his fist at an imaginary opponent, or looked appealingly at his auditor for a response.

Grania, however, never uttered word or syllable. She hardly looked at him, could not have told afterwards what he had been talking about, or what had passed them by. They took to their oars again after half an hour, and rowed slowly homeward,

past the western extremity of the smaller island, foreshortened here to a low conical hill ; across the Foul Sound, where the swell was breaking in puffs of spray across the skerries ; on and on till once more their own island stood before them, its big rath making it seem from this point lower even than usual. It was very dark indeed now. They had to feel their way as they best could round the outlying reefs, all but grinding against them, till they finally ran the curragh ashore upon the single spit of firm sand just below the old church of Cill-Cananach. Dark or light, hot or cold, sunlight, starlight, moonlight, it was all one that evening to Grania. The world itself seemed to have changed ; to stand still ; to be a new world. Everything about and around her had changed —the sea, the sky, the boat, the rocks, the shore—above all, herself ; herself and Murdough. She knew now what she had only

guessed before—knew it through every pulse and artery of her body. The old walls had broken down. The common heritage was at last hers—hers and, as it seemed to her, his also. They loved ; they were together. How, then, could the world fail to have changed ?

Even after they had at last touched the shore ; after she had got out of the boat and had helped Murdough to pull it up on the sands ; after they had left it behind them, with that queer, twinkling greenish water still flapping fantastically around its sides ; even then she seemed to herself to be still in a dream, still to be dazed, still to be walking amongst the clouds. She only came back fully to life and to ordinary reality again when they had left the sands, and the sea, and the green, uncanny phosphorescence behind them, and were mounting soberly, one after the other, up the narrow, shingle-covered track which led to the cabin.

CHAPTER VII

THE road from Cashla Bay past Spiddal into Galway is as grim a one surely as is to be found in these three kingdoms. Mile after mile it runs through a grey world of boulders, varying from the size of a hencoop to that of an average cottage. Mile after mile, and still you say to yourself that the stony deluge must have reached its limits, that the stones will soon begin to cease; somewhere or other, a little farther on, at the next turn, there will be unencumbered fields again; grass, perhaps; possibly even trees; at the worst an earth free from this soul-wearying, this eternal, interminable incubus of stones.

But no ; mile after mile, and still never a sign or hint of change, never the slightest diminution in their multitude. The straight road—good and level as all West Connaught roads are—runs on and on through this rock-encumbered wilderness as if it loved it. There are low drift-hills near at hand, stone-covered like the rest ; there are a few nipped and draggled looking villages at long intervals ; there is a more or less misty glimpse of Connemara mountains occasionally to be had ; also a much nearer view of Clare and the hills of Burren ; there is the bay, very near indeed, with, perhaps, a ‘ pookhaun ’ or a hooker upon it ; now and then a stream dashes by, struggling with difficulty through its incubus of rock, and disappearing under a bridge ; otherwise, save stones, stones, stones, there is nothing till the Galway suburbs grow, grey and unlovely, upon your sight.

It was the day of Galway fair, the last of

the great western spring fairs, and a large party of Aranites were on their way to it. Grania and Murdough were amongst them. Grania had her calf to sell, also a couple of pigs. Murdough had nothing to sell and nothing to do, but any opportunity of escaping for a few hours from Inishmaan, any prospect of stir, bustle, and life was welcome to him. It was he, therefore, who had urged Grania to go this time herself to the fair, instead of entrusting the calf and pigs to Pete Durane, who usually sold them for her, charging a modest commission for his own benefit upon the transaction.

She had at first demurred. She did not want, she said, to leave Honor. This was a perfectly true reason, but there were others as well. An inborn reluctance, a touch of savage pride had always hitherto made her shrink from facing the crowds and the bustle of the mainland. Ever since those early days

of her trips with her father in the old hooker she had hardly set foot outside their own islands. There had been for her a sense of great dignity and importance in those old, lost, but never-forgotten days. How, indeed, could there fail to be? To sail across the bay in one's own private hooker; to enter a harbour in it; the fuss and bustle of embarkation; the loud talk of the other hooker-owners with her father; the stares of the open-mouthed, bare-legged beggars and loafers upon the pier—such details as these had naturally given a sense of vague but vast dignity and grandeur to a small person sitting bolt upright upon her ballast of stones, and looking with a sense of condescension at all these new houses and faces thus brought, as it were, officially, under her notice.

After this to land, like anyone else, from a curragh at Cashla Bay, and to tramp tamely along a road, was a descent not easy to bring

the mind to. Murdough, however, had so urged the matter, had pictured the delights of the fair in such glowing colours, had undertaken to look after her so energetically, to aid her so indefatigably, that in the end—the glamour of that fishing evening being still upon her—she had consented. Honor, too, had wished her to go, had arranged that Molly Muldoon should come and sit with her while she was away, had disposed of every difficulty, and had herself waked her up at three o'clock that morning so as to be ready to start at dawn for the curragh, looking so much better than she had lately done that Grania had been able to start feeling as if all was really going well, and all would still go well with her and with all of them.

And in the morning all had gone well. The weather was very fine, though there was a suspicious movement and bustling up of clouds to eastward. As for the scenery,

certainly a stranger would have seen little variation, save in point of size, between its stoniness and the stoniness of Inishmaan. To Grania, however, as to all whose eyes are not spoiled by too varied and too early an acquaintanceship with many landscapes, small differences made great ones, and there was enough variety in that morning tramp through those stone-encumbered pastures to cause an exhilarated sense of travel and enlarged acquaintanceship with a world as yet imperfectly known and visited.

To walk briskly along the wide, indefinitely extending road, with Murdough Blake beside her ; to hear him expatiating, descanting, pointing out the different objects she was to notice ; to look from right to left ; to laugh and nod to other passers-by—all this surely was novelty, stir, and exhilaration enough for anyone ! The group of Aranites tramped rapidly along in their

cow's-skin pampooties, their tongues keeping pace with their legs. In their home-made flannel clothes and queer shoes, with their quick, alert, yet shuffling tread, they formed a marked contrast to the ordinary peasants of the mainland, most of whom stopped short on encountering them, and a brisk interchange of guttural salutations took place. Yes, certainly, it *was* amusing, Grania thought. Murdough was right; it was a mistake to stay always in one place. One grew to be no better than a cow, or a goat, or a thistle growing upon the rocks. It was good to look abroad. The world, after all, was really a large place. Why, beyond Galway there were actually other towns; Dublin even; that Dublin which Murdough was always talking about and pining to get to. Who could tell but what she herself might some day see Dublin? Stranger things had happened.

Matters went less well when they at last reached Galway. The fair is held in the middle of the town, in its main square, the Belgrave or Grosvenor Square of its fashion and importance. The crowd was already great, all the people from the country round having streamed in long before our more distant Aranites could reach the scene. To Grania's unaccustomed ears the noise seemed to echo and re-echo from every house around, big grey or white houses—enormously big in her eyes—and all strange, all full of people standing in the windows and looking out, laughing at the crowd below—that crowd of which she herself was but a solitary and an insignificant fragment.

She had considerable difficulty in discovering her own beasts, which had been sent by boat the night before so that they might be fresh for the fair, and even after she had found them the next difficulty of finding

purchasers was to her inexperience absolutely paralysing. If Murdough had stayed with her and helped her, as he had promised to do, all might have gone well, but almost immediately after their arrival he had gone off to look at a horse, promising to return quickly, and had never done so. Left to herself, Grania soon grew utterly miserable and bewildered. She was not frightened by the crowd, for that was not her way; but the noise, the shouts, the rude shoving, the laughter, the rushing to and fro of the animals, the loud thumps upon their wretched backs, the pushing of the people about her, the constant arrival of more cars, more carts, more people, more beasts, more big, excited men in frieze coats, the necessity of being constantly on the alert, so as to hinder oneself from being cheated—all this disturbed and annoyed her. Further, it offended her dignity, used as she was to moving at her

own free will amid the solitude and austere silence of her own island.

Worse than all the rest, however, and deeper than any merely temporary vexation, was the sense of Murdough's defection. Why had he left her? why did he not come back when he had promised to do so? why *to-day*? —just to-day when everything had promised to be so happy? She scanned the crowd in every direction, growing from minute to minute more wretched, more and more hurt and angry. A burning, deep-seated anger such as she had never before experienced seemed to fill her veins. She was hot and cold at once; she was sick with vexation and disappointment. The end of it was that, after vainly waiting and looking about her, seeing him twenty times in the distance, and finding, as he drew near, that it was someone else, she suddenly accepted an offer for her calf from a cattle-jobber which was

at least ten shillings less than she ought to have got for it, and, making over the two pigs to Pete Durane, telling him to do the best he could with them, she darted away out of the fair, out of the town, retracing her steps almost by instinct along the road to Spiddal, her whole soul smarting under a sense of wrong and injury.

It had begun to rain while she was still in Galway, and as she advanced along the road the rain grew momentarily heavier. There was not a scrap of shelter of any sort, and before she had gone many miles she was drenched to the skin. The immensely thick red flannel petticoat she wore, in all other respects an admirable garment, is apt in the long run to become a terrible drag in such a downpour as this. Once soaked, it weighed upon her as though it had been a petticoat of solid lead, and she had again and again to pause and wring it

out as she might have wrung a sponge. In spite of this she hurried on along the dreary, featureless road, hardly heeding where she was going, only filled with the desire of escaping from that dreadful fair, which to her had been a scene not merely of disappointment but something far worse—a breaking-down of this sweet, this newly-found, this hardly-touched happiness—a source of intense bitterness; of a bitterness how intense she herself hardly yet knew.

At last, though how long after she left Galway she could not have told, she once more reached the spot, not far from Cloghmore Point, where they had disembarked in the morning. No boat was ready to take her across; the men were all away; there was not even a curragh to be seen, or, in her present mood, she might have attempted to get across the bay by herself. As it was, there was nothing for it but to wait till someone

arrived. Once more, therefore, wringing out her petticoat and gathering up her hair, which had got loose in her race, she got under the shelter of a bank and sat down upon a stone, near to where a small stream was bubbling and trickling through a pipe.

It was a wretched spot. There were a few cabins a little farther up the road, but it did not occur to her, somehow, to ask for shelter in any of them. She simply sat still upon her stone under the bank, waiting for someone to come, feeling miserable, but almost too tired now to know why or about what. The rain beat upon her head ; the wind whistled round her ; the sea was a sheet of ink, save for here and there the white crest of a breaker. She was growing very cold after the heat of her walk, and her wet clothes clung closely. She had eaten nothing since the early morning. As regards all this, however, she was for the moment not indifferent merely, but unconscious of it.

Presently the door of the nearest cabin opened, and a woman came out, carrying a pail in her hand. She came directly towards Grania, who sat still on her stone under the pelting rain and watched her. She was a terribly emaciated-looking creature, evidently not long out of bed, though it was now getting to the afternoon. She seemed almost too weak, indeed, to stand, much less to walk. As she came up to the stranger she gazed at her with a look of dull indifference, either from ill-health or habitual misery ; set her pail under the pipe in the bank through which the stream ran, and, when it was filled, turned and went back, staggering under its weight, towards the door of her cabin again.

With an instinct of helpfulness Grania sprang up and ran after her, took the pail from her hands and carried it for her to the door.

The woman stared a little, but said

nothing. Some half-naked, hungry-looking children were playing round the entrance, and through these she pushed her way with a weary, dragging step. Then, as if for the first time observing the rain, turned and beckoned Grania to follow her indoors.

Dull as it had been outside, entering the cabin was like going into a cellar. There was hardly a spark of fire. That red glow which rarely fails in any Irish home, however miserable, was all but out; a pale, sickly glimmer hung about the edges of some charred sods of turf, but that was all.

A heavy, stertorous breathing coming from a distant corner next attracted Grania's attention, and, looking closely, she could just distinguish a man lying there at full length. A glance showed that he was dead drunk, too drunk to move, though not too drunk, as presently became apparent, to

maunder out a string of incoherent abuse, which he directed at his wife without pause, meaning, or intermission, as she moved about the cabin. One of the brood of squalid children—too well used, evidently, to the phenomenon to heed it—ventured within reach of his arm, whereupon he struck an aimless blow at it, less with the intention apparently of hurting it, than from a vague impulse of asserting himself by doing something to somebody. He was very lamentably drunk indeed, and probably not for the first, or the first hundredth, time.

The woman indifferently drew the child away and sent it to play with the other children in the gutter outside. Then having set the black pot upon the fire, she squatted down on her heels beside it, heedless, apparently, of the fact that there was not a chance of its boiling in its present state, and taking no heed either of her visitor or of

her husband, who continued to maunder out more or less incoherent curses from his corner.

Grania shivered and felt sick. Something in the look and extraordinary apathy of the woman, something in the hideous squalor of the house, affected her as no poverty—not even that of the Dalys at home—had ever done before. She raked together the embers, and put a few fresh sods of turf on the fire—seeing that the woman of the house was either too ill or too indifferent to do anything—then sat down on a low creepy opposite to her, feeling chilled to the bone and utterly miserable.

Something new was at work within her. She did not yet know what it was, but it was a revelation in its way—a revelation as new and as strange as that other revelation two days before in the boat, only that it was exactly the reverse of it. A new idea, a

new impression, was again at work within her, only this time it was a new idea, a new impression upon the intolerableness of life, its unspeakable hopelessness, its misery, its dread, unfathomable dismalness. Why *should* people go on living so? she thought. Why should they go on living at all, indeed? Why, above all, should they marry and bring more wretched creatures into the world, if this was to be the way of it? How stupid, how useless, how horrible it all was! Yes, Honor was right, the priests were right, the nuns were right, they were all right—there was no happiness in the world, none at all—nowhere! Murdough Blake?—well, Murdough Blake would be just like the rest of them, just like every other husband—worse, perhaps, than some. He wanted to marry her, it is true, but why? Because she was strong, because she owned the farm, because she owned Moonyeen, and the pigs, and the little bit

of money; because she could keep him in idleness; could keep him, above all, in drink; because he could get more out of her perhaps than he could out of another!

She looked suddenly across at the mistress of the house and it seemed to her that she saw herself grown older. Evidently the other had once been a handsome woman, and was not even now old, only worn out with ill-health, many children, much work, much misery. Her left hand, which she held mechanically towards the now rising blaze, was so thin that the wedding-ring seemed to be dropping off; her hair was still black, and hung about her emaciated face in draggled-looking coils and wisps like seaweed. Staring at her in the dusk of that miserable hearth Grania seemed to see herself a dozen years later: broken down in spirit; broken down in health; grown prematurely old; her capacity for work diminished; with

a brood of squalid, ill-fed children clamouring for what she had not to give them; with no help; with Honor long dead; without a soul left who had known her and cared for her when she was young; with shame and a workhouse on the mainland—deepest of all degradation to an islander—coming hourly nearer and nearer, and a maudlin, helpless, eternally drunken—

With a sudden sickening sense of disgust and yet of fascination she turned and looked again at the man, still swearing and squirming in his corner. All at once an overpowering feeling of revolt overtook her, and with a bound she sprang to her feet and ran out of the cabin and down the road. Anywhere, anywhere in the world would be better than to remain an instant longer looking at those two, that man, that woman! Who were they? Were they not simply herself and him—herself and Murdough?

It was raining harder than ever, but she went on a long distance, far away from all the houses, before she again crouched down, this time nearer to the shore, under the shelter of a big boulder, there to wait till the rest of the party returned from Galway.

It was a dreary, and seemingly an endless wait, but they came at last. Half an hour at least before they reached her she could hear Murdough Blake's voice, far away up the road, and the minute he saw her he ran forward and began a long, involved account of all that had delayed him and prevented his return—how he had met Pat this, and Larry that, and Malachy the other, what they had said, done, and consulted him about. It was an even more involved account, and one that entailed a yet more profuse expenditure of vocabulary, than usual, and this and his looks showed that the proverbial hospitality of Galway had not belied itself. Grania

answered nothing ; accepted his explanations in absolute silence ; sat looking in front of her silently upon her thwart all the while they were crossing back to the islands. She was so often silent that neither he nor anyone else in the boat noticed anything unusual. When they reached the shore, however, she turned instantly away, without a word to any of the rest of the party gathered together at the landing-place, and walked slowly home by herself to the cabin and to Honor.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was what is called a turning-point, but there are many such turning-points in all lives, and some of them are important, and some not. One thing was lost for Grania, not to be recaptured again. The young exultation, the extraordinary elation of that evening in the boat she never again felt. It had not lasted long certainly, but it had been good while it lasted—very, *very* good. Why that day of the Galway fair should have killed it, utterly and unrecognisably, she could not have explained, but so it was. Murdough had behaved in much the same fashion often before : left her to herself, gone away, said he would come back and not done so, returned

in the end more or less the worse for drink—but what of that? It was the normal state of things, a state to be reckoned with, hardly to be especially aggrieved by or astonished at. Why should the defection of one afternoon count when the defections of many previous ones had hardly counted at all?

There is no use in asking such questions, no use in such probings. Our probes are too short, and we simply miss the point we aim at. We know them each in our own turn, recognise them more or less silently, more or less unwillingly, and there is an end of the matter. Grania, at any rate, did so. She recognised, silently and unwillingly, that she had been a fool; recognised it grimly and with bitterness. Bitterly too and silently she repeated to herself that Honor's way of looking at the matter *had* been the true one. Not as regards the joy, the peace, the glory, that was to be attained; that was as inscrutable, as little believable

as ever, at any rate, for herself, whatever it might be in the case of ready-made saints like Honor. Where she had been right was as regards this world. That part was all quite true. Happiness was simply *gusto*—nonsense—there was no such thing !

The two sisters clung very closely to one another during those long summer days—days which were to be the last of their life together—closer than they had ever done before. Grania had a curiously strong feeling that Honor's death would be for herself also the end of all things. It was a period, at any rate, beyond which she did not and would not look. A touch of desperation had got hold of the girl. Honor and Murdough ! they had always been her world ; she had no other—anywhere—and now both seemed to be crumbling, both to be failing her !

One of them certainly was. Honor was sinking rapidly. Her emaciation could hardly

be greater, but her power of taking food was daily decreasing and her strength waning; the end plainly was very near now.

Towards the middle of August a spell of oddly hot, dull weather fell upon the islands. The sea seemed to go to sleep. The gulls and puffins hung along the edge of the shore like so many tame ducks or other barnyard creatures, bobbing lazily upon the small crestless waves, but without energy apparently to carry them farther. Soon rows of curraghs with barrels stuck upright in them might have been seen passing at intervals to and fro to Cashla Point, going empty, returning full. There had not been any rain for four weeks past—a state of affairs which meant a water-famine for Aran.

Honor suffered from this warmth and closeness as she had never appeared to suffer from the cold and the blustering winds, a condition of things to one of her rearing too natural probably to have any effect one way or other.

Night after night during that hot, dry spell she lay awake, although she always tried to persuade Grania that she was sleeping soundly, so as to induce her to lie down and get some sleep herself. Every now and then, however, a low, dry cough, breaking from her corner, or the feeble sound of her voice raised in some softly-uttered supplication, belied the kindly pretence.

One night, towards the end of the third week of August, these fits of coughing had been unusually long and bad. From about seven in the evening till long past eleven the hard, hacking sound had never ceased for an instant, and the consequent exhaustion was intense. Grania had sat the whole time with her arms about her, supporting her, and feeling, as she had often done of late, as though she herself was receiving support from that contact as well as giving it. From time to time she gave Honor some water or a little whey to drink, or re-

newed the dip candle which stood upon the shelf, but they hardly spoke. What, indeed, was there for them to say?

Something in the dull warmth of the night, something in her own restless unhappiness, something in the sense of the nearness for Honor of that brink which, to her, too, seemed to be the end of all things made Grania even less able to bear patiently the other's suffering that night than usual. Her love for Honor, which seemed to herself to have increased tenfold of late, her admiration for her extraordinary patience, that sort of wild anger and revolt which the suffering of those we love is apt to awaken in us, they all worked together in the girl's mind, until at last, when the paroxysms were beginning to abate, they broke from her lips in the form of an angry protest.

'How you do bear it, Honor—all night and day too—never a bit of ease or com-

fort! I do not understand it, no, I do *not*! If it was me I should just fight, and kick, and scream; yes, I should! I should curse everything, yes, everything—and God! I should curse and I should fight till I died fighting, so I would; no other!'

'Och, then, whist, whist, with your wild talk, child,' Honor exclaimed, breathlessly. 'Fight God! Is it sensible of what you're saying you are, you poor, ignorant child, or gone clean mad you have this hot night? Listen to me, Grania, and come a bit closer, for I can't speak loud. Don't think I'm any better than yourself, child, for I'm not, ne'er a bit, and for patience, it is out of all patience I am, often and often, times upon times beyond number, out of all patience, and longing to die and be quit of it all. "What is the use of it, my God," I say, "what is the good or the sense of it? Is it any glory or honour you can get out of the likes of me, lying here,

and coughing my heart away? Sure, my God, isn't it enough? Won't you give me the bit of ease, and I suffering so bad and so long? Sure, my God, what is the meaning of it at all, at all? Is it with all the saints about you up there in glory and grandeur, you'd want to be looking down at a sick lone woman lying on her back out on a poor little bit of a bare rock in the middle of the salt, salt sea?" And then, Grania dear—well, 'tis like this—there's a feeling, I can't tell it to you, for I haven't the words, nor couldn't if I had them itself. 'Tis for all the world as if someone was saying, "There, there! Whist with you; whist, I tell you! I know how you feel, you poor creature! I know it! I know it! There, there! Be easy a bit longer; it's coming to you; it's coming! I'm sending it—the peace, and the joy, and the rest of it." And then, Grania, I look out towards the Old Sea there, and I say to

myself, “ It’s coming ! It’s coming ! It’s on the way ! My God, it’s on the way ; it’s on the way ! ” Honor crossed her hands, and her white face shone wonderfully.

Grania’s lips twitched ; her eyes filled uncontrollably ; she made a violent effort to brave it off, but it was not to be done. All the trouble of the last few weeks, all the bitterness of this new discovery—a discovery which was secretly eating into her very flesh—the sight of the suffering so patiently borne by her sister ; it all seemed to come upon her at once. The barriers broke down ; the floods carried all before them, and she burst out crying. It was like a child’s crying, so loud, so open, so unconcealed, once it had got free.

‘ Auch ! Auch ! Auch ! What’ll I do ! Auch, my God, what’ll I do ? ’ she exclaimed, sobbing. ‘ Say, Honor agra, what’ll I do at all without you ? Is it leaving me you’d be, leaving me all by myself in this big cold

world? Auch! Auch! What will I do?
Auch, my God, my God, what will I do?’

Honor turned towards her, astonishment in her mild eyes.

‘Sure, pulse of my soul and heart of my heart, ’tis *well* you’ll do,’ she said, coaxingly. ‘Arrah, then, I don’t mean just at first’—for Grania made an angry gesture of denial—‘but after a bit—when the grief is a little easy, as it will be, and when you can think of me as I shall be, well at last, and going with the help of the saints to be better still. Sure, what am I but a charge to you, and have been these years upon years past? And for the house and the creatures and the rest of it, is not it your very own they are and always have been, and you the first in the world for cleverness and management, and that not on Inishmaan alone, but the two other islands as well, not to speak of the Continent itself? And for anything else, sure you know there

is not a boy on the island that isn't after you, so that you could marry, you could, if you had six hands for them to be putting rings upon, or seven, instead of one, and Murdough Blake himself at the head and top of them all ! '

By this allusion to Murdough Blake, Honor had thought to touch the right chord, and to remind Grania of all that still remained to her after she herself was gone. It had exactly the opposite effect, however.

‘Murdough Blake ! Murdough Blake ! Wisha ! ’tis little *he* cares for me, no more than he does for old Moonyeen out yonder ! ’ she exclaimed, fiercely. ‘ ’Tis the house and the beasts and the bit of money *he* cares for, if he cares for anything, so it is—that and himself ! ’

It was the first time she had ever admitted such an idea in words, the first time that the long pent-up bitterness had ever crossed her

lips. Pride, modesty, custom—the last the strongest barrier of the three—had hindered her from touching upon such a subject, even to Honor. Even now the words were no sooner uttered than a rush of shame overtook her—of shame and a feeling of self-betrayal. She grew red up to the roots of her hair, got up, stammered something about seeing to the beasts, snatched up her petticoat, which was lying near her, and ran out of the cabin into the darkness before Honor had realised what she was about, or could utter a syllable to detain her.

CHAPTER IX

SHE did not go very far. Only as far as to the end of the platform, stopping at her usual spot, close to the big granite boulder which blocked the mouth of the gully. Her head was spinning ; wild thoughts came and went in it, without, as it seemed to her, her having anything to say to them. She was tingling from head to foot with the sense of self-betrayal, a betrayal not so much to Honor as to herself, to the world at large—to the birds of the air and the stars above them—letting them all know what pride, decency, self-respect required to be kept for ever locked up and hidden away.

The fact is, though it is difficult for an out-

sider to believe it, that the whole subject of love, of passion of any kind, especially from a girl and with regard to her own marriage, is such an utterly unheard-of one amongst Grania's class that the mere fact of giving utterance to a complaint on the subject gave her a sense not merely of having committed a hideous breach of common decency, but of having actually crossed the line that separates sanity from madness. Could she really be going crazy? she asked herself. Would she soon be seen gibbering by the roadside like mad Peggy O'Carroll, who was always laughing to herself at nothing, and being mocked at by the boys as they drove the kelp donkeys to and from the sea-shore?

What ailed her? she again asked herself. What *did* ail her? It seemed to be literally like some disease that had got into her bones —this strange unrest, this disturbance—a disease, too, of which she had never heard;

which nobody else so far as she knew had ever had ; a disease which had no name, and therefore was the more mysterious and horrible. As a matter of fact, she was to some extent ill, or rather her usually perfect health had for the moment partially deserted her. Close attendance on Honor, many sleepless nights, trouble of all kinds, the wear and tear of nursing, all these had broken down those good solid barriers which a life spent eternally in the open air would otherwise have kept up. Sturdy, too, as she was, there was nothing bovine in her strength, on the contrary, like most Irishwomen, she was a nervous creature at bottom, however little she might have seemed so when those barriers were in their proper place. At present they were gone. She was unstrung, and we all know what that means. So completely was this the case that she had even become aware of it herself. She felt worn out, and wrought up to a pitch

of desperation. Something she must do, she felt, but what, that was the question, what?

She went to the edge of the platform and put her head against the big boulder, invisible but still present, a familiar object sustaining and comforting. Stooping down, she pressed her cheek closer and closer against the gritty surface till it began to hurt her. What ailed her? she once again asked herself, what *did* ail her; what did it all mean? ‘Auch, what will I do, my God, what will I do, at all?’ she moaned suddenly, speaking aloud into the friendly deaf ear of the night. ‘Arrah, if I was but dead! if I was but dead! My God, if I was but dead, wouldn’t that be the best way out of it, at all, at all?’

She did not mean this, by the way, in the least. She did not want to die, to be dead. Life was bounding and beating within her, on the contrary—beating to the point of pain. It

was a protest merely, a voice from the very strength of her youth and her love. She asked for death, as all young creatures ask for death when what they really want is life —only life with a difference.

By-and-by, as the air began to cool her, or the old stone brought counsel, she tried to think the matter out, to get a little away from her trouble, and to look at it with some degree of reasonableness. Thought to one of Grania's rearing and powers of comparison and deduction is a queer, dim process, very strange in its methods, very mysterious often in its results. In its own fashion, however, it has to be gone through, and is gone through, especially under the stress of strong emotion. Under that stress she now began to try and consider the matter ; to try and see if there was not some way to be found of getting rid of this new, this utterly intolerable, wretchedness. What if she made up her

mind, she asked herself, to give up Murdough —now, at once, to-night—surely that would give her peace if anything would? She was not bound to marry him, and if she were, his tipsiness and ways of going on recently would be excuse enough, if she wanted or cared about an excuse, which she did not. She lifted her head, and tried to think this new idea clearly out; to see what it was, and where it led to. Yes, to give him up! to be free; completely free. Surely that was the right thing to do—the right thing and the spirited thing! Yes, she would do it, she resolved. She would see him herself —to-morrow morning the very first thing—she would see him and she would tell him so, that she would.

A glow of tingling satisfaction shot through her as she thought of meeting Murdough the first thing in the morning, and telling him in an easy, off-hand fashion that she had made

up her mind and that she was not going to marry him, that he need not think it, for she had quite made up her mind. Stay, would it not be even better, she next reflected, if she could tell him at the same time that she was going to marry someone else? *Someone* else, yes; but who else? That had to be decided. Who was there that she could declare on the spur of the moment she intended to marry instead of him? Well, why not Teige O'Shaughnessy? she thought; poor Teige O'Shaughnessy, who was so sober, so industrious, so hardworking, so exactly everything that Murdough was not; who would leap out of his very skin with joy at the bare idea; who would not even need to be informed beforehand; who would do everything she wished: obey her, follow her, worship her all his life, she instinctively knew, just as Pete Durane obeyed, followed, and worshipped Rosha, badly as that termagant treated him.

The idea seemed for the moment a perfectly brilliant one, a haven of refuge, a complete solution for all the miseries of the past few weeks. It stood out before her as a splendid spirited programme, brimful of satisfaction, brimful, above all, of a delightful promise of vengeance. Murdough's rage, Murdough's scorn of poor Teige, Murdough's fury at herself, Murdough's attempts to change her resolution, her own air of jaunty indifference—a sort of parody of his former ones—surely, surely it should be done, and done, too, the very next day !

She got up and moved about the platform with a sense of having regained her old liberty, with a sense of being once more Grania O'Malley, the cleverest, strongest, richest girl on the whole island. She was about to return to the cabin when—suddenly, like a thunderbolt—the reaction came. She stopped short with a feeling of absolute terror, a feel-

ing of having taken some irrevocable step, a feeling of sheer panic. ‘Oh, no, no, no, no, no !’ she cried aloud. ‘Oh, no, no, no, my God ! Sure you *know* I didn’t mean it. You know right *well* I didn’t. ’Twas only mad I was ! just mad, out and out, no other !’ — Mean it ? Better be ill used by Murdough ; beaten by Murdough ; toil, drudge, be killed by Murdough ; better have her heart broken ; better have to give up the farm, and be ruined by Murdough, than live prosperously and comfortably with anyone else ! The thought of the cabin seen a few weeks before at Cashla rushed back suddenly upon her mind, but now with none of that previous sense of disgust, none of that horror of revolt and loathing which had filled her then. Even in this extremity, even so, dead drunk in a corner, Murdough was still Murdough—the first ; the only one. Idle ? yes ; tipsy ? yes ; cold, unkind, indifferent even ?

yes, yes, yes, still he was *Murdough*, her *Murdough*, always the same *Murdough*, and what did anything else matter?

The love that had come down from the very beginning of things, the love that had never known a break, the love that was a part of herself, a part of everything she saw and touched, of everything she could imagine, the tenderness that had curled itself subtly into every fibre of her body, was not to be dislodged in so summary a fashion. It clung tenaciously ; clung only the harder because it ought to be dislodged, because she herself wished to dislodge it. A sudden wave of desperate love, of tender, reckless passion, swept through her, and she stretched out her arms.

‘Auch, Murdough, *Murdougheen*,’ she murmured tenderly. ‘Where are you, Murdough? where are you then, at all, at all, this dark night? Arrah, come to your poor

Grania ! Where are you, dear ? where are you ? '

She ran back to the edge of the platform, and flinging her arms again about the boulder, pressed her cheek against its gritty irresponsible surface. It was like a reconciliation ! There had been a quarrel, and now there was no quarrel; none ! She and Murdough ; she and Murdough ; always, always, *always* she and Murdough. The warm dark night about her, the scarcely audible note of the sea upon the rocks below, the stars blinking sleepily overhead ; they all seemed to be so many witnesses and assurances of that reconciliation.

CHAPTER X

YET she did not after this seek him out, or try to make their relations closer in any way. On the contrary, it was a few days later that the first serious quarrel of their lives occurred. Murdough had not been near her for over a fortnight. She did not even know where he was, for he had got into the habit of being continually away on the mainland, no one knew where or for what. Late one afternoon, however, he came and beckoned mysteriously to her to come out on the platform and speak to him. He was evidently—for the moment, at all events—as sober as a judge.

She went. There was a worn, draggled look about her face, due partly to watching, partly to anger, partly to the cross-fire at war

within her. She was longing to quarrel fiercely with him ; to have it all out ; to rage and storm at him ; to startle him, if she could, with her anger ; and then—and then—to tell him that she loved him better than all the world besides ; that she would do anything he liked ; that she did not care how he behaved, not even how often he got drunk, if only he would not leave her always alone, if only he would care for her a little, a very little, more. The recollection of that evening in the boat still clung and clung to her very heart-strings. The sun was setting as she came out upon the platform ; a warm wind swept round the rocks ; the little tansies and saxifrages were all bathed in the dusky yellowish light.

Murdough had something important to say, however, and, therefore, wasted no time in useless and quite unaccustomed preliminaries.

‘Then I would not have called you out, Grania, for I know you do not like to be called, and that is why I have kept away so much, so it is,’ he said, with his customary air of ingenuousness. ‘But to-day it is in a little bit of difficulty I am again, a little bit of trouble and difficulty, so it is to you I have come.’

She put her back against her old friend, the boulder, and waited to learn what she was to do.

‘It is just a little bit more of the money that I want you to give me, that is what it is; yes, indeed, nothing more,’ he went on, with the same air of ingenuousness, smoothing down his hair as he spoke. His eyes looked as clear that evening, the rascal, his whole aspect as fresh, vigorous, and wholesome as though he had never tasted anything stronger in his life than buttermilk.

‘Thirty shillings it is this time, and it is

to Micky Sulivan of Allyhaloo that I owe it, and he is a hard man, is Micky Sulivan ! My God, yes, a very hard man, everyone knows that, a real nigger. He will not wait one week for his money, he says ; no, nor a single day.'

An angry light was beginning to awaken in Grania's eyes.

' And why should I give you thirty shillings for Micky Sulivan, Murdough Blake ? ' she said, in a tone that had a suggestion of distant thunder in it. ' It is a great deal of money I have given you this quarter already, so I have—a great deal of money ! '

Murdough looked hurt. There was every reason why she should give it in his opinion. She had it, and he wanted it. What better reason could there be ?

' Then I did not think you would speak so to me, Grania O'Malley, I did not,' he answered in a tone of natural indignation.

‘ And for “ a great deal,” you have given me money three times, but not much at any one time, my God, no, not much at all ! Fifteen shillings it was once, and seventeen shillings another time, and twenty-two shillings another. That is not much, even when you put it all together, not much at all. There is young Macdara O’Flaherty, he will spend two, three, four, pounds, real gold pounds, right off and think nothing of it. I did not think you would speak so, Grania O’Malley, when all the world knows that we two are to be married shortly, and you such a rich girl.’

The angry light in Grania’s eyes grew stronger. She set her back squarely against her old friend. She was going to have her turn for once.

‘ It is not the rich girl I would be, not the rich girl, but the beggar ; yes, the beggar, and nothing else, out upon the cold, naked rocks, that is what I should be, if I were to

marry you, Murdough Blake, so it is ! ' she exclaimed, striking the stone beside her, anger upon the subject she did not greatly care about breaking loose because anger upon the subject that she did care about must perforce be kept hidden away. Once begun, however, it was easy enough to go on upon this topic.

‘ For it is the shame and the talk and the disgrace of the world you are getting to be ! There is not a man, nor a woman, nor a child, down to the youngest on Inishmaan, but knows you, and knows that it is the truth ! Drinking and drinking, and making a heathen beast and fool of yourself, gadding about the town from morning till night, always drinking, drinking, drinking ! Is it to make a *baulyore* of myself that I would be giving you my money and be marrying you ? then I will not do it, so do not think it. I will not make a *baulyore* of myself for any man that ever was born. Do you think it is the wife of a

man like Shan Daly that I want to be? to be working and working for ever, and him drinking the whole world dry, and spending the money faster than I could make it if I had six hands, and more? No, indeed, that is not the sort of man I will marry, so I will not! It is a good man, and a sober man, and a decent man I will have, and no other will serve me, not if he were the only man in the whole world and the king of it, so you need not think it! And that is my last word to you, so it is, Murdough Blake, my very last word, God help me, therefore you may believe me.'

She stopped short, hot and panting. The words had rushed out with a fluency quite unlike her usual utterances. They were driven by that fierce current behind them. They came in this form simply because they were longing, but forbidden, to come in quite another one.

Murdough was genuinely astonished. Those secret currents, pent up, longing and struggling madly to find an exit, were invisible to him, and quite unsuspected, but that Grania would dream of changing her mind about marrying him had never so much as dawned upon his imagination. If his notions about love and all that belonged to it were of the dimmest, his notions about himself and all that belonged to himself, including his obvious desirability as a husband, were of the clearest and most definite character. Grania belonged, too, to him, always *had* belonged to him, no one else had ever pretended to rival him in her eyes. Her admiration of him, and of his various gifts and graces, had been patent to all men ; she had never concealed it, or attempted to conceal it. All Inishmaan knew that in her eyes there was no one like him either on the island or off the island, and that a mere

occasional lapse from sobriety, a mere occasional demand for a little extra ready money, that trifles of this sort could seriously be held a reason for giving him up was too ridiculous an idea to find entry readily into his mind.

He cast about for a minute how to answer. What did she mean? What was she driving at? Who had been putting notions into her mind? Was it Honor, or who? That his wisest course would have been to be a little affectionate to her; to have appealed to her affection for him; to have put his arms round her; nay, if so wild, so utterly unprecedented a course had proved necessary, to have actually gone so far as to kiss her; that *this* was what she wished, what she was waiting for, he did not know in the least. It was a great pity there was no one at hand to tell him so, for he was really an exceedingly intelligent young man, quick to take a hint, and would doubtless have essayed even this unpractical

method of argument had he known it to be the one most likely to succeed under the circumstances. He was by this time very much in earnest, and had no idea of being in his turn made a *baulyore* of, as she had said, and a laughing-stock before all Inishmaan. He did not know it, however, and the result was that natural annoyance prompted him to take up quite a different line, one not nearly so well calculated to be successful. It was an error of judgment, but to such errors even intelligent people are occasionally liable.

‘ Begorra, this is grand news you have for me this evening, Grania O’Malley, so it is ! ’ he exclaimed, with a loud laugh, though his face was red, and an angry look in his eyes betrayed some lack of indifference. ‘ Grand news, glory be to God, and ’tis myself is obliged to you for telling it to me ! And who is it that you’re going to take up with, now you’ve given me the go-by, if you’ll be so

polite as to tell me? 'Tis some rich gentleman over from the Continent, I'll be bound, that you have been putting your *comether* upon, or, may be, a lord from Dublin? Gorra, 'tis the proud place Inishmaan will be when it sees him coming to carry you off! my faith, yes; the proud place and the proud people we'll be, every one of us! Sure, how could a poor young fellow like myself have any chance with you, so grand and so proud as you'll be? Musha, it's not Irish will do you then to speak, I suppose, but the best of fine scholar's English, and a grand house with a slate roof on it you'll have no doubt to live in, and a servant, please God, or maybe two, to wait on you. Och, glory! glory! it *will* be the great day for Inishmaan when Grania O'Malley is seen sailing off with her new husband the lord from Dublin! *Wurrah!* *Wurrah!* the grand day, please God, and no mistake.'

The jeering tone, the laughter, the sting of all this from Murdough, *Murdough*, of all people in the world, lashed Grania to madness. She looked wildly round her for a weapon—physical or otherwise it mattered little—blind, helpless anger possessing her. Suddenly the remembrance of her thoughts a few nights before—of her momentary notion about Teige O'Shaughnessy—returned to her mind, and she seized upon it. It was a poor weapon, as she probably knew, but it was the only one visible upon the spur of the moment.

‘Then it is no gentleman I am going to marry, so it is not ! no gentleman at all, for it is enough of fine, idle gentlemen I have had, God knows, and that is the sort I am tired of !’ she exclaimed. ‘It is a quiet boy, and a decent boy, and a poor boy that I am going to marry, one that will work hard, and not drink, drink, drink, day and night, till he doesn’t know his one hand from the other, or the floor from

the roof over his head, or the sun from the moon, or the grass from the stones, or God's green earth from the salt black bottom of the sea ! It is a good man and a faithful man, and a man that will love me, and care me, that is the sort of man that I want and that I am going to be married to, so I am. And if you wish to know the name of him, it is Teige O'Shaughnessy, and *that* is the man I have chosen, and whom I am going to marry, so it is, Murdough Blake ; the very same, no other !'

Murdough stared at her for a moment in open-eyed astonishment. Then he burst into a still louder laugh, a laugh that might have been heard right across the island. This time it was quite a genuine one. His vanity, which would have been touched to the quick if Granja had thrown him over for someone whom he could by any possibility have looked upon as a rival, was left untouched, was even

gratified, by the mention of Teige O'Shaughnessy, between whom and himself no such rivalry was in his eyes possible ; nay, the very juxtaposition of their images was a sort of indirect compliment to himself. His sense, therefore, of the ridiculous was genuinely tickled. Besides, to do him justice, he did not believe her in the least.

'Auch ! then, glory, glory ! Glory to God ! and more power to you, Grania O'Malley, but it *is* the grand man, sure enough, you have chosen, so it *is* ! The grand man, the handsome man, and the rich man, glory be to God ! Och ! but it is the right sight and show you will be when you and Teige O'Shaughnessy are married ! Glory to God ! the right sight and show, and the fine, straight, handsome husband it is you will have, bedad ! Arrah ! will you be so obliging as to tell me was it the handsome, straight legs of him, or the beautiful spotty face

of him, or the fine colour of his hair that first took the fancy to? Or maybe it was the beautiful big house he has to give you on top of the rocks yonder? or the nice, sweet-tempered aunt he keeps in it, that will be such pleasant company to talk to when you are sitting there by yourself? My faith and word, Grania O'Malley, it is myself will laugh to see you and Teige O'Shaughnessy when you are man and wife! Gorra, I will tell you now what I will do—then I will, please God!—I will go out in a curragh, and will bring with me every bouchaleen upon Inishmaan, and we will all go out together on to the sea, and will follow you to watch and look at you, when you are on your way to Aranmore to be married to Teige O'Shaughnessy. Glory be to God! Glory be to God! it *is* the match you have got hold of, sure enough! my faith and word, the match! Och! 'tis killed I'll be

with the laughing!' And he rolled to and fro upon the rocks.

Grania's face was scarlet. She sprang forward till she was within half a foot of him. Blind rage possessed her. She shook from head to foot, and clenched her fists in his face. A little more and she would have pummelled him soundly with them.

'Out of this! Out of this! Out of it with you this very minute!' she cried. 'Get off this ground, and get off this rock, and go laugh somewhere else, for it is not here you shall laugh, so it is not! It is not here you shall come ever again, for I do not want to have you, and I do not want to see you, and I do not want to hear you, nor to have anything to do with you!—never again, so long as I live—never, so help me! And for my money, which is all you come for, and all you want, you need not be asking me for any of it again—not for Micky Sulivan, or anyone

else—for I will not give you one thraneen more of my money, so I will not—I will throw it into the sea first. I will not do anything for you, and I will not see you, and for marrying you, I would not marry you, not if you were made of solid gold from head to foot, and were crowned King of all Ireland or of the world itself! For it is not such a husband as *you* I want, and so I tell you !'

She was back into the cabin and had shut the door before Murdough the fluent could utter another word. He stood for a minute or two longer upon the platform, then walked away rather soberly, scratching his chin as he went. In his sense of the intense, the delightful, the utterly convulsive absurdity of any comparison between himself and Teige O'Shaughnessy he had momentarily forgotten the rather important errand upon which he had come to speak to Grania. He remembered it now, and it was with an

uneasy sense that he had not perhaps managed his interview quite as judiciously as he might have done. It is all very well to be excessively witty and brilliantly sarcastic, but, then, it interferes sometimes rather seriously with business.

CHAPTER XI

IT was one of those victories, nevertheless, that cost more to the winner than the loser. The first rapture, the first keen tingling satisfaction of her explosion over, Grania was more miserable than ever. What had she done? she asked herself, aghast. Done? She had done the very thing, the mere thought, the momentary dread, of which had all but scared her out of her senses a few nights before. Broken with Murdough! Of her own accord, actually of her own free will, she had broken with him; refused to marry him, refused to see him, refused to speak or have anything more to do with him. *Broken with Murdough!* Refused to marry Mur-

dough! It was like breaking with life, it was like refusing to breathe the air, refusing to eat or to drink, refusing to move a limb! How could she do it? What! live on, on, and on; thirty, forty, fifty years, perhaps, and in all that time, in all these years, the interminable years that stretched ahead of her, no Murdough! *No Murdough?* Murdough wiped out of her life?—it was the sun and the stars, it was life itself wiped out! Nothing could make such a vision endurable—nothing could make it even conceivable!

She went about her work, therefore, like a dazed creature; saw to the house, cared for Honor, fed the beasts; but it was as a body with no soul inside it—a mere shell. Was she herself, she sometimes wondered dully, or was she someone else? She really hardly knew.

Oddly enough, Honor seemed scarcely to

notice that anything was specially amiss with her. This came partly from sheer physical weakness, and partly from that absorption in her own drama which all souls, even the tenderest, seem to feel at the coming on of death. Grania, besides, had always been a bit ‘queer’; given to extremes—now elated, now depressed—and it did not seem to her that she was very much more so than usual. As to her being specially unhappy about Murdough Blake, that was a trouble quite out of Honor’s ken, and not one of the things she would have dreamed of worrying herself over. That Murdough was lazy and wasteful, was given occasionally to getting drunk, was rather good for nothing and worthless generally, these were facts which, even if anyone had called her attention to them, she would probably have accepted placidly enough. No doubt he was most of these things. Why not? Wasn’t it only to be

expected that he would be, seeing that he was a man and a young one? Why wouldn't he be? Didn't God Almighty, for some mysterious reason of His own, make them mostly so?

A view so general, and at the same time so tolerant in its pessimism, was not likely to be disturbed by any particular illustration of it. If anyone had, further, proceeded to point out that Grania was not likely to be happy, married to such a man, Honor, for all her sisterly devotion, would probably have replied, equally placidly, that no doubt she would not be happy. Why, again, should she be? People as a rule were not happy, nor meant apparently to be happy, and the married state especially stood before her mind as a state of natural and inevitable discomfort —one in which there was always a more or less troublesome and unmanageable male to be fed, looked after, and put up with

generally. That it possessed any counter-balancing advantages ; that it could, even at the start, be, for a woman, a state of especial happiness, she simply did not, for a moment, believe. She would have been too polite to contradict anyone who had chosen to put forward such an assertion, but in her own mind she scouted it utterly. ‘Arrah, holy Bridget ! what could there be in it to make any woman in this earthly world *happy* ?’ she would have said to herself. Her own private opinion was that all that was an invention got up by the men. *They* persuaded the women to believe there was something pleasant in it, and the silly creatures were fools enough to believe them. That was all. The whole thing was really exceedingly simple !

This being her standpoint it followed that the pangs of unrequited love were the last that would have been successfully laid bare

before her. Of Grania's future she did, indeed, think incessantly, but it was a future that skipped over the next forty, fifty, or sixty years, and fixed itself only upon what lay beyond that trifling interregnum. Day and night her thoughts fixed themselves more and more in this direction ; hoping, interceding, imploring for the one that had to be left—left in a cold, ugly world—pleading that she might be brought in ; that her heart might turn ; that, sooner or later, they two might stand together safe—safe, as she put it to herself, in Glory—a place which, if it had no name, no inhabitants, no conceivable whereabouts, was still at least as real and as definite to her as those rocks, as yonder sea that she habitually looked at. It was the one thing that still troubled her ; the one thing that kept her from her peace ; perturbed her poor soul, and brought the tears into her patient eyes.

So they went on together, as others beside them have gone on, and will go on, till all things end, till all the books are written, and every story finished ; loving one another, that is to say, with a love which, on one side, at least, had gathered to itself all that, under other circumstances, might have spread over a considerable field, understanding one another as much—well, about as much as most of us contrive to understand one another—as much, in other words, as if they had never met, never grown up in the same nest, never eaten off the same loaf, never touched hands, or exchanged a syllable in their lives.

Poor Honor's sisterly petitions were not, it must be owned, prospering, for Grania in these weeks was certainly not improving. A new recklessness had got hold of her. It was in her blood—for she came, upon both sides, of a wild, untameable stock—but it had never risen so near to the surface before. Circum-

stances had tamed her, as they tame most people; a certain sense of responsibility had tamed her; doubts and self-perplexities had tamed her; of late, too, that keen, hungry clutch at the heart had tamed her. Now she no longer cared, or thought that she no longer cared. The barriers were completely broken down; the floods were out and away; there was no knowing yet how far, or how furiously, they might travel.

One afternoon, about a week after her last interview with Murdough Blake, she had been up to Allyhaloo, the village at the extreme south end of the island, to get some straw for Moonyeen, and was coming down the path with a great load of it on her back. The wind swept round and round her head with a sort of fickle, clamorous insistence, now rising to a wailing climax, then suddenly sinking, then as suddenly wailing out again. The sea was of a uniform grey,

a few darker lines being drawn here and there across it as if by somebody's fingers. The Cashla coast, Spiddal, the whole line of the Connemara hills were lost and muffled in swathing, formless bands of mist.

Grania fixed her eyes steadily upon the path, which was all she could see, bent down as she was under her bundle. Her mind, except now and then under strong emotion, still worked only as a child's mind works—vaguely, that is to say, with a sort of dim diffuseness—stirred by what came to her through her senses, but lapsing into vagueness again as soon as that direct impression had worn off. In this respect she was just what she had always been. The events that had recently happened had been events belonging to and affecting quite another region. Her mind stood aloof, uninfected, unenlarged, untouched by them.

A real event, by the way, had happened

that afternoon. A party of people—English people, it was reported—had come over from Galway in a pleasure yacht, and had made the tour of the islands, visiting not Aranmore only, but the other two islands as well—a rare event at the present day, twenty-five years ago an almost unprecedented one.

As she came down, picking her way carefully over the stones, her mountain of straw towering behind her, Grania suddenly perceived that this party were coming right towards her up the path. It was the direct way to Dun Connor, the chief, if not the only, lion of the island, which the strangers, no doubt, were then on their way to visit. A ragged tangle of children followed them, shouting and clamouring for half-pence.

A vehement feeling of annoyance made Grania long to rush away, to hide herself behind a boulder, to do anything rather than have to

encounter these strangers—gentry, the sort of people that Murdough was always talking about and envying—people who lived in big white houses with staring windows like those she had seen in Galway. Pride, however, and a sort of stubbornness hindered her from running away. She went on accordingly down the path, and, when the contact became imminent, merely stepped a little aside, on to a piece of flat rock beside a stunted thorn-bush, and stood there—her cumbersome burden rising behind her—waiting till the visitors should have passed.

There were three of them—two ladies, and a young man escorting them. They came up laughing, evidently amused, and enjoying the sense of discovery—for Inishmaan was all but untrodden ground—a flutter of skirts and parasols, of hat-ribands and waterproof cloaks filling up the pathway.

Grania stood doggedly waiting—her head a little thrown back; something of the stir and stress that filled her visible in her whole look and bearing; a wild, untamed vision of strength and savage beauty standing beside that crooked and stunted thorn-bush.

The visitors to the island were a little taken by surprise by it. One of the two ladies put up an eyeglass to look at her, at the same time touching her friend's arm so as to call her attention.

With an angry sense that she was being stared at, Grania on her side turned and gazed fiercely at them, her great slumberous eyes, so Southern in their darkness, filled with a curious lowering light.

The visitors passed hastily on up the track.

‘Did you notice that girl standing above the pathway?’ one of the ladies said to the

other. ‘How she stared! Did you observe? Not quite pleasant, was it?’

‘Yes,’ the other answered, clutching rather feverishly at her skirts. ‘Don’t go so quickly, dear. What stones! Yes, I noticed her. A fine, handsome creature, I thought—picturesque, too, in her red petticoat—but, as you say, not exactly pleasant-looking. Generally they have such good manners, poor creatures—quite decent, you know!’

They hurried on, for a storm was clearly coming up, and the yacht was not built for heavy weather. Quick, hot gusts of wind kept following one another over the grey, treeless surface of the island. The sea, too, sent up an occasional growl—a hint as to what might be coming. The visit to Dun Connor had accordingly to be cut short, and, with a hasty glance at the wilderness of stone around them, the visitors turned down the

path again, and betook themselves to the shore.

From her usual post beside the cabin Grania watched them stumbling over the stones in their haste and rapidly embarking, with a feeling of satisfaction in her own fierce sea and sky which had scared away these fine people so suddenly.

A dull wrath, like that of the coming storm itself, was in the girl's veins. She had passed Murdough early the same day—one of the O'Flaherties and Phil Garry were with him at the time—and he had ostentatiously gone on talking and laughing, without paying the smallest attention to her presence. She, on her side, had passed him without a glance, but it had seemed to her as if every drop of blood in her veins had turned in that instant to boiling lead, and she could have killed all three of them then and there, without ruth or hesitation, had her means been only

equal to her wishes. It was still burning dangerously in her, that dull wrath, made up of anger, inarticulate despair, of love turned for the time being into a sort of sombre hatred. The necessity, too, of concealing it from Honor made it all the worse and all the more perilously pent up within her.

As it happened, a mode of expending it came that very night, and the long mystery of the stolen turf was at the same time cleared up.

The promised storm came on to blow unmistakably about six o'clock, and by nine or ten o'clock it had grown to a regular tempest. North and south, east and west, it seemed to come from all directions at once. Warm scuds of rain fell as if from a bucket. Then the Atlantic joined the concert, its hollow, bull-voiced roar, full of suggestions of ship-

wreck, terror, and death, coming up unceasingly to them from below.

Poor Honor was rather frightened. The suddenness of the storm disturbed and distressed her. It seemed unnatural, this combination of heat and of rushing wind. It was a new thing to her experience, and seemed to forebode evil. From time to time the sound of her prayers could be heard coming from her own dusky corner, the words caught and carried off, as it were, before they were half uttered by the rushing wind, which tore down the chimney and seemed to be bent, this time, upon dislodging the sturdy, much-enduring little house from its deeply-set foundations upon the rocks.

Grania remained huddled beside the hearth, without approaching the bed. She was conscious that she was not good company for Honor that evening, so kept away from her as far as possible. Suddenly, as they sat

there, with the width of the cabin dividing them, a loud, piercing scream seemed to break between them. It was so close that both believed for a moment that it was inside the house. It was only the scream of a passing gull or gannet, scared, like the rest of the world, by the suddenness and peculiarity of the storm, but it had an oddly human, oddly articulate sound. It had hardly ceased, too, before, with a thump and creak of its hinges, the door swung suddenly open, with that peculiarly eerie effect characteristic of doors which open of themselves.

Honor uttered a low wail of dismay, and, clasping her hands together, began nervously to pray aloud—a queer mixture, half of Irish, half of Latin, escaping her lips. Grania got up and went to the door, picking up the iron poker from the hearth as she did so, and taking it with her, probably from a recollection of the well-known superstition that iron

is a safe thing to have at hand if there is anything uncanny in the air.

She was turning back and was about to shut the door, when she noticed, to her surprise, a man's figure, rather the shadow of a man's figure, passing behind the low wall which divided the little yard from the unenclosed waste of rock without. Suddenly a thought shot through her, a vivid thought, a thought which grew like lightning into a certainty. Could it be? was it?—yes, it was—*Murdough!* Murdough repenting; Murdough come to see after them in the storm! It was—it must be! A flood of hope, bounding, tumultuous, almost painful; a sudden confused rush, first of vehement love, then of equally vehement anger, then of love again, broke across her brain, making her reel and stagger as she stood upon the threshold.

Telling Honor that she was only going to

see that the beasts were all right, and would be back in a minute, she hurried outside, closing the door softly behind her.

Sure enough a figure was there, for she could still see it moving, the dim silhouette of a man's figure thrown against the rock. Grania watched and waited. Her heart was beating now so that it was an agony. The expectation of Murdough's approach, the thought of his coming, the touch of his hands, the nearness of his presence was so strong, so convincing, that it had already become a reality. A reality, alas and alas! it certainly was not. Another moment showed that no one was coming, no one at least to the door or anywhere near the door. In the dim light she could still distinguish the figure of a man, but it was a small man, consequently it was not Murdough; moreover, this man, whoever he was, was creeping stealthily behind the low wall that enclosed the cabin, and getting

round to the back of it—to that part where the turf-stack stood piled.

Grania remained standing where she was, the poker clutched in her hand—all her hopes dashed; all the thoughts of a moment ago turned forcibly back into a different channel. Her face, could it have been seen in the darkness, would have been a curious study. Passion was written on it, and passionate anger; hungry, baffled love was there, and a not less hungry or less baffled desire for revenge. They were all there; all working and struggling together. Suddenly she made a bound forwards; she had crossed the yard; she had seized the trespasser—had clutched him by the back of his neck—and was holding him as a mastiff holds a burglar. It was like Vengeance descended miraculously from the sky itself, so unexpected was it, so startling in the hurly-burly of that hot, wild night. An involuntary yell of terror

broke from the turf-stealer, and he turned, wriggling like a worm, and struggling vainly to escape from her clutch, a clutch which was for the moment like iron. It was, as the reader will hardly need to be told, Shan Daly ! An old basket was beside him, already half full of turf, and there was a lump of it in each hand. Never was criminal caught more feloniously red-handed.

Grania's pent-up wrath had now found its channel. The barriers were all up. The current was at the full. The wild blood of the O'Malleys, the wild blood of the Joyces—neither of them names which, for those who know the West, carry any mild or merciful associations with them—was hot in her veins like fire. Desperate rage, that rage for which killing seems the only alleviation, for the time being possessed her wholly. Her head swam, her teeth were clenched together, her right arm rose ; the storm itself was not more

reckless of consequences for the moment than she. A little more, another five minutes, and blood would have flowed over the rocks : for that iron poker in Grania's hands was no plaything.

A mere chance hindered it. A plaintive cry broke suddenly from the cabin. It was Honor's voice calling to her sister to come in, to come back, not to leave her. What was she doing ? It was frightened she was of being alone by herself in the wild night. Grania ! where was Grania ? What was Grania doing at all ?

The cry, so pitiful in its weakness, reached the other's ear even in all the height of her fury. What was she to do ? she asked herself in the rapidly concentrated thought of the moment. Could she kill Shan Daly without disturbing Honor ? That, probably, was the form in which the question practically presented itself to her mind. To kill him, or

at least to beat him then and there within an inch of his worthless life, was clearly the thing to do, but to disturb Honor, to frighten Honor, that, under all circumstances, was to be avoided. The result was that in the indecision of the moment her grip probably relaxed, for, with a sudden tug and the wriggle of an escaping conger eel, Shan Daly contrived to shake it off, writhed himself a few inches away over the stones, dragged himself beyond her clutch, half fell over the big boulder in his panic, then, picking himself up, fled down the hill, terror in all his limbs, but an intense sense of escape, of deliverance, tingling through every inch of his frame. For a moment he had seen the figure of Death standing over him with a poker in its hand, and the sight had scared him. If ever that dusky soul of his sent out a genuine ejaculation of thankfulness heavenwards, it was probably at that moment !

PART IV AND LAST
SEPTEMBER AGAIN

PART IV

SEPTEMBER AGAIN

CHAPTER I

THE month of September had begun, but the breach between Grania and Murdough was still unhealed. He, on his side, was feeling less at ease than his jaunty air or undisturbed manner might have led anyone to suppose. This unlooked-for decision upon Grania's part was, he could not but own, startling. So far he had kept the fact to himself, not choosing it to be known, and knowing that she was extremely unlikely to speak of it. It might have entailed unpleasant consequences had it leaked out. In Inishmaan, as in more imposing places, there are inconveniences likely enough to fall upon a brilliant young man when a

marriage which is to set him upon his legs is known to be broken off.

What ailed her? he asked himself again and again. What an extraordinarily queer girl she had grown of late! he next reflected, thinking over the scene of their quarrel. What queer eyes she had!—‘Tis as if the devil himself was sitting at the bottom of them, and staring at you—the devil himself, no better—enough to scare a man, so they are! quite enough to scare a man!’ he repeated several times to himself, as he recalled the look of concentrated rage with which she had sprung upon him and swept him, as it were, out of her path in her fury. ‘Twasn’t safe she looked, so she didn’t then—not safe at all. And what did I do to make her so mad? Only laughed at her about Teige O’Shaughnessy! My God, and who wouldn’t laugh at her about Teige O’Shaughnessy? *Teige O’Shaughnessy, wisha!*’

That Grania would seriously dream of marrying Teige he did not for a moment believe, but that, even in anger, she should throw such a rival in his teeth was an insult very difficult to stomach. Murdough had never asked himself for a moment whether he cared for Grania or not, the question would probably have seemed to him utterly superfluous. Of course he cared for her. Had she not always been there; always, in a fashion, belonged to him? Why in the world *wouldn't* he care for her?

That he had liked her better in the old days when she was still the little Grania of the hooker, before she had shot up into this rather formidable woman she had so suddenly become, there is no denying. The little Grania had admired him without criticism; the little Grania had no sombre moods; the little Grania never gazed at him with those big, menacing eyes—eyes such as

a lioness might turn upon someone whom she loves, but who displeases her—the little Grania was natural, was comprehensible, was just like any other little *girsha* in the place, not at all like this new Grania, who was quite out of his range and ken; an unaccountable product, one that made him feel vaguely uneasy; who seemed to belong to a region in which he had never travelled; who was ‘queer,’ in short; the last word summing up concisely the worst and most damning thing that could be said of anyone in Inishmaan.

He brooded over all this a good deal, sitting and swinging his legs upon the steps of the old villa, which, since his grandmother’s death, he had taken pretty constantly to inhabit, it being preferable, in his mind, despite its bareness, to the overcrowded family cabin up at Alleenageeragh. That there was a sense of relief in being free from Grania and

her ‘queerness’ he was aware, but, on the other hand, there was a yet greater sense of failure and of defeat. His vanity was badly hurt by it, likewise his pocket, and the two together acted as a powerful counterpoise. He was ‘used,’ moreover, to Grania. His future had always held her as a matter of course, just as hers had always held him, and use, more than all the other ingredients of existence, possesses a tremendous leverage upon beings of Murdough’s type. The end of his brooding was that one evening, about a fortnight after their quarrel, and a couple of days after the scene between Grania and Shan Daly, he waylaid her as she was coming back from the kelp fire, hiding for that purpose in an old clump of hawthorn bushes till she should pass by.

This clump stood upon the flattest bit of land in the whole island, so that from it, as from a post of vantage, he could see a long

way, miles it seemed, over the dim, still faintly-gleaming surface. Where he had hidden himself was the only spot that broke this flatness, a flatness sloping imperceptibly till it merged into the sea at high-water mark. It was a fine warm evening, though there had been heavy rain in the daytime. A quantity of small brown moths flew round his head, other and much larger white ones kept emerging one after the other from the nettles and brambles that covered the fallen stones, for, like almost every clump on the islands, this too held a well and a scrap of old ruined church hidden somewhere away at the bottom of it.

After waiting half an hour, he saw Grania coming towards him, the only living thing far as the eye could reach, everything else being either stone, or else vegetation hardly less grey and arid. As she came near an unexpected qualm seized Murdough, a sudden alarm

as to what she might be going to say or to do ; how she would behave when she saw him there. It was quite a new idea for him to dream of being afraid of Grania, or to doubt his own unquestionable superiority over her ; but since their quarrel she had assumed rather a different aspect in his eyes, and this evening she looked, he thought, bigger and more imposing, somehow, than usual, as she came walking slowly towards him, solitary and empty-handed, her eyes staring straight in front of her as if she were seeking something that was not there. The impression was so strong that it even occurred to him for a moment that he would let her pass, as he easily could do, and stay hidden away in his lair until she had gone by.

‘Arrah, great King of Glory, ’tis the mortal queer-looking girl she has grown to be, sure and certain !’ he muttered uneasily. ‘ My soul from the devil, what ails her these

times, at all at all? She that used to be the nice, easy, little *girsha*.'

Whether he would have called to her or have let her pass unchallenged, it is impossible to say, but it happened that as she drew near to the clump she slackened her already slow pace, and looked directly towards him; her eyes, as it seemed to him, piercing right down to where he stood hidden in the centre of the thorny thicket. Concluding, therefore, that he was discovered, he got up and in rather a quavering voice, called to her, and asked her to stop.

She started violently, and stopped dead short, then looked again, not directly towards him, but a little farther on, as if doubtful whether she had really heard a voice, or only imagined that she had done so. Murdough's head and shoulders rising out of the clump was a piece of evidence not to be mistaken. Still she stood rooted to the same spot, staring

at him, not speaking ; staring as if he had been his own ghost.

What were they going to say to one another ? What, after their stormy parting, after that fortnight of silence and alienation, was the footing upon which they were to meet ? Neither of them knew, and it was probably accident that decided that point. Murdough's inspiration was at any rate a happier one than his last had been.

'Then it was waiting to walk back to the house with you I was—yes, indeed—just waiting to walk back with you, that was all, Grania O'Malley,' he said, with a decided quaver in his voice, and an air of mild depreciation.

The tone and look, more even than the words, disarmed the girl utterly ; further than this, they filled her with a sudden, a delicious sense of happiness. She said nothing, but when he had stepped over the mass of

branches, and through an outer circumvallation of nettles, and had come up to her, she was trembling violently, and it was silently and still tremblingly that she turned and walked back beside him through the dusk, as they had so often walked before.

It was the only explanation between them, but it seemed to suffice. The first awkwardness of the meeting over, Murdough's tongue soon regained its nimbleness, and he began telling her a long tale about a curragh which he had bought or proposed to buy, if so be, God willing, he could find the money. It was Malachy O'Flaherty's own curragh, and the best in the islands, barring one, and that was Phil Garry's father's big curragh which had gone to the bottom in the great storm on the twenty-eighth of January last. Poor old Mick Garry's heart would have broken to lose it, so it would, honest man, only, thank

God, he hadn't long to fret about it, for he was drowned himself at the same time, and only that Phil Garry and his brother Teddy had stayed at home and hidden themselves, they would have been drowned too, as the little bouchaleen Pat was, who had been the only one of the family the old man could get hold of when he went out in such a hurry to save the nets. But Malachy O'Flaherty's curragh was a picture, fit for a king, and had been the first in of seven that had started at the Ballyvaughan races last March ; at least seven would have started only that two never got off, for one of them broke her rudder the day before, and the other had a big hole stove in her side, through Thaddeus Doonan, that owned her, leaping into her in a hurry, the fool, with his boots on. She was the handsomest boat on the whole bay, and had been newly caulked and canvassed by Malachy himself only that very year. There was no

curragh like her in Galway or out of it, and it was raging mad the Claddagh men were about it, for whoever owned her would be sure to win the big race that was coming on next month, with twenty boats starting and three shillings down to every boat. Twenty times three shillings would be sixty shillings, that was three pounds, and if he had to sell the coat off his back, and the shirt too, he'd do it rather than not have her to race in, for it was a sin and a shame letting her go to those who didn't know how to row no more than black crabs down at the bottom of the sea. That was what Malachy O'Flaherty had said, and he had said, too, that he would give it to him dirt cheap, because he'd like to see her coming in first at the big race, and not let everything good go to strangers. What was the good, Malachy had said, of stinting and saving for ever? Was it when a man was old that he wanted the money most? No, it was

not, it was when he was young, for how did he know he would ever live to be old at all, at all? Could you take the money into the grave with you? No, you could not, for money was of no use there, nor anything else either, when you would be dead and buried! That was what Malachy O'Flaherty had said, and it was quite true, so it was, quite true. It is not in the grave, nor in heaven either, with all the grandeur and glory you'd find *there*, you would be wanting money, whether it was much or whether it was little.

To all this Grania listened silently, as usual, turning her eyes upon him from time to time with a curiously lingering expression. There was a look of inquiry in her glance, a look of entreaty and expectation, a look of impatience, too, only it was impatience curbed and restrained by something stronger than itself. So they walked on side by side until they had reached the cabin. Here Murdough, whose

tale was finished, was turning away, but she made a quick sign to him to stop; went in with resolute steps, came out again and thrust something hurriedly into his hands. It was a bank-note, and all the money that she had at that moment in the world with the exception of a few shillings, and what must be kept absolutely sacred for the expenses of Honor's funeral.

Murdough's astonishment and delight burst out then and there like a fountain; burst into a torrent of words—vague, iridescent, incoherent. Projects of every sort—races to be won, victories over rivals, money, much money, to be earned in the future—they all poured forth; flew and hurtled through the air; one golden scheme jostling against another in its hurry to express itself. Grania listened, but her eyes never lost that oddly intent, wistful expression. She stood perfectly still while he capered about the rocks, waving his

hands and snapping his fingers as he descended first on one project then on another. Suddenly she turned, and, leaving him to finish his flights by himself, went in, closing the door behind her; not this time, however, with a bang, but slowly, with a gradual and, as it seemed, a reluctant pressure from within.

It was with a more conscious strut than usual that, after waiting a minute to see if she would return, Murdough marched off towards the old villa, the note she had given him making sweet music against his pocket as he did so. Money! Not a few paltry shillings, but a whole large sum at once. He was a king! There were no possibilities that were not open to him, no dream that might not be fulfilled, no hopes that might not suddenly bloom into life. Where was Teige O'Shaughnessy *now*? he asked himself with derision. How long would it be before anyone gave

him money like that?—the poor, mean, scraping, saving little *boccach*.

Through all this satisfaction there returned, however, from time to time the same vague uneasiness about Grania. She had only done what she ought; had given him the money right off in a lump, without any lecturings or bargains; that was all quite natural and proper, but, upon the other hand, what sort of wife would she be, this Grania, for a quiet, easy-going boy, who only wanted to live in peace and quietness? Wasn't she queer? Mother of Moses! she *was* queer! the queerest girl in the whole world! That was the burden, refrain, summing-up of all his meditations about her.

Once in the course of these meditations he chanced to look up and catch Shan Daly's ferrety eyes peering at him from their red-rimmed sockets as if he were trying to make out what he was thinking of, for Shan, too, had

got into the habit of creeping into the old villa, preferring its shelter to the mud-banks and sides of walls which of late had been his habitual resting-places. The relative standing of these two had become exactly reversed since Murdough had grown to be a man, and a strong one. Formerly, Shan, we know, had bullied him unmercifully whenever he got the chance; now, Shan was his henchman, his jackal, the patient partaker of all his moods. It spoke a good deal for Murdough's good temper and inherently unresentful way of looking at things, that he never showed the slightest inclination to avenge himself upon Shan, or to pay back his old wrongs as he easily might have done. On the contrary, though he despised him, as everyone did, he seemed rather to enjoy his society than otherwise. He was 'used' to him, you see, and that counted for so much. Have we not seen that he was also

‘used’ to Grania O’Malley? Between a man with no scruples whatever, no character to lose, no qualms of any sort save fear for his own skin, and a mere convivial young gentleman who has never done anything worse than get drunk and run into debt, the sense, too, of superiority is perhaps never wholly upon one side. Murdough knew nothing of Shan’s latest adventure, but he had long had cause to suspect that Shan, for some reason, hated Grania. Several times he had been aware that it was Shan who had prevented him from going to see her, or who had egged him on to doing things she disliked. This, and a slight feeling of embarrassment upon the subject, kept him from telling him of her recent donation. All the same he was genuinely grateful for it, and in the first flush of his gratitude laid out a variety of schemes which he would, could, or might carry out in the course of the next few weeks to gratify

her. ‘Queer’ she undoubtedly was, mysteriously, unaccountably queer, but at least her queerness had, this time, taken a right instead of a wrong direction!

CHAPTER II

As it turned out, there was no opportunity for any of these amiable schemes to be carried into effect, for the very next day Honor was taken suddenly worse about nine o'clock in the evening, and to all who saw her it seemed clear that the end had at last really come. There was great dismay amongst those who were drawn to the cabin by the news, not so much on account of the fact itself, as on account of the difficulty, the perennial difficulty at Inishmaan, of getting a priest across from the larger island in time. Grania had wanted to send Teige O'Shaughnessy for Father Tom that very morning, but Honor had forbidden her to do so, wishing to delay a little longer,

so that the last rites might be received as near the end as possible. Now that end had plainly come, but to get a priest across the sound before the next morning was clearly out of the question.

It was a thick night, with showers of rain at intervals, but upon the first intimation of the change old Molly Muldoon had travelled faithfully across the rocks from Ballinlisheen, according to her promise, and after the other women had gone she remained to share in the task of nursing, and to aid Grania in what both believed to be the last night of Honor's life. Towards three o'clock, every moment, it was thought, must see the end, but the chilly, fatal hours passed by, and Honor still lived. About five o'clock Molly had to go to see after her chickens, which 'would be mad,' she explained, 'the creatures, with hunger,' but promised shortly to return. Grania merely nodded. She was sitting, as she had

sat all night, close beside the bed, gazing upon her sister with eyes from which even the desire for sleep seemed to be permanently banished.

About seven o'clock Honor herself sank into a doze of exhaustion, and Grania thereupon stole out of the cabin to go and look for little Phelim Daly, and send him for Murdough Blake, or in default of Murdough, for Teige O'Shaughnessy, so as to get one or other of them to go at once to Aranmore, and implore Father Tom for the love of Heaven to come to Inishmaan without delay.

She had hitherto been too absorbed to notice or think about the weather, but now, as she stepped outside the cabin and down the gully, she found that a sudden fog had come on, a dense waving curtain of mist, under which everything in front of her was already submerged. It was a fog that seemed to be coming to them from the Connemara side of

the bay, and had evidently only recently reached the island, for the sea to the south of it was quite clear. In the direction in which she was going vast cloud armies, still more or less detached one from another, were marching steadily onward to the assault. Height over height, fold upon fold, on they came ; clinging to the rocks, following the little indentations of the shore, smothering every object the instant they touched it in a thick, cloying, inextricable embrace. It was curious to see how partial was still this invasion. Here, to the left, the sea was clear, the pale rays of sun lighting up the wash of the waves as they broke over the outlying rocks and skerries ; there, to the right, the bays and cooses were already choked to the very brim. Overhead at one moment she could see a sky, clear, seemingly, to the zenith ; another minute and the thick woolly masses had swept over her, lower and lower still, pouring on and

on from their inexhaustible fog cauldrons away to the north and the north-west.

She hastened down the track, and along the lower ridge to the Dalys' cabin ; found the boy and despatched him on his errand, with strict orders not to rest or come back until he had found either Murdough or Teige O'Shaughnessy. Then she returned, to take up her place again beside Honor's bed.

So the day wore on. Molly Muldoon did not return for a long, long time, and she remained therefore quite alone in the cabin. There was hardly any change. Honor continued to doze, and Grania, absorbed in watching her, had almost ceased to notice the passage of time. Suddenly, about three in the afternoon, she was startled by an extraordinarily rapid accession of darkness, almost like the coming on of night, a darkness so great as to make it all but impossible to see across the cabin.

Going to the door and opening it, she found herself facing a solid-looking wall of vapour in which every detail of landscape seemed to be lost. To the south indeed the sea was still visible, but even here the whole surface was covered with a shroud of mist, dense in some places as wool, and curdling momentarily thicker and thicker, as battalion joined battalion, the more scattered ones stretching fleecy arms to one another across the still visible spaces of water. Evidently this was no morning mist, likely to disperse, but a dense sea fog such as now and then in autumn and early spring, rarely at this season, enclosed the islands in its folds, rendering all communication from one to the other well-nigh impossible for days at a time.

Startled, she turned to look towards the larger island, by this time utterly lost to sight. What was to be done? she thought anxiously. How was Father Tom to be brought, and

would he ever be persuaded to venture across the sound in such a fog? What too could have delayed Murdough or Teige? Had Phelim failed to find either of them? Surely, if one happened to be away the other would have been at home? Here was another day passing, and that Honor could survive this night also was hardly to be expected.

That the nearness of the end was troubling the sick woman herself was clear, for when Grania got back to the bed Honor's eyes were open and fixed themselves instantly upon her with a longing expression. Seeing that she wished to speak, Grania stooped and leaned over her. Honor's white lips parted with a great effort.

'Is he coming? allanah?' she muttered breathlessly. 'Auch, Grania dear, don't be delaying! 'Tisn't long I'll be in it now, and you wouldn't let me go without the good words at the last?'

'No, no, Honor ; don't think of it. Don't be afraid. He'll come, sure enough. Be easy, dear ; he'll come.'

Honor's eyes closed again patiently with a satisfied expression, but Grania's mind was a prey to desperate anxiety. What was to be done? Where could Phelim be? Was no one coming to them? She hurried back to the entrance and stood there, straining her eyes into the fog, her heart wrung with passionate anxiety.

Presently a movement made itself seen in it, and a figure was visible dimly struggling up the track towards her. Her whole soul went out in a prayer that it might be Murdough ; surely it must be Murdough? But no, another moment showed that it was not a coat but a petticoat that was moving through the fog. It was only, in fact, the faithful Molly Muldoon come back to take her turn at the nursing. Grania beckoned to

her eagerly, and, having explained the situation in a few words, picked up her own petticoat and ran off through the fog in the direction of the old villa. If Murdough Blake was to be found anywhere, it would be there, she knew.

CHAPTER III

SHE was out of the cabin and the fog had closed around her almost before the words were uttered. It was like a pall, only a white pall instead of a black one, a pall that seems to get through and through and round and round you, to swathe the limbs, to enfold you to the very skin. Down from the sky in white masses it came, and up from the sea—a new sky, a new sea—the very air appeared to be half solid, air that seemed to choke, yet which was light enough and cool enough as you swallowed it.

Grania, as she sped along the familiar track, seemed hardly to know where she was, so rolled round and isolated from every-

thing and everyone was she by this strange enveloping fleecy stuff. As she went on something, too, seemed to happen to her. It was as if the fog had got between her and everything she had come out to do. She hardly thought now of Father Tom. The sick bed, with the white drawn face and the anxious eyes so near death, watching, always watching the door; the hot race between death and the priest—all this, that had so filled her mind the whole day and the previous night, seemed to melt now and to disappear. A new set of images had arisen. It was a new goal towards which she seemed to be hurrying, for which she was fighting the fog, to which she was struggling on and on through this blinding whiteness.

More and more as she warmed with the struggle her old self emerged, as a rock emerges which has been temporarily hidden by the waves. The thought of Murdough-

rose with it. It was Murdough whom she had so often gone along this path to meet ; it was Murdough whom she was going to meet now. The old love, the old dumb, unquenchable desire rose in her, as it had so often risen before. The remembrance of that evening in the boat—the one evening of evenings in her life—stood out before her like a vision. With it rose the remembrance of two evenings ago when she had looked up suddenly and seen him standing in the middle of the big thorn clump. In the isolation created by the fog, in the glow of her battling with it, in the stress of her own feelings, he seemed to be already with her, to be beside her, to be touching her ; not the every-day indifferent Murdough either ; the unsatisfactory, conversational Murdough, the Murdough who got tipsy and mocked at her, the Murdough who was always wanting money, but the real Murdough, the Murdough she had never ceased

to believe in ; who looked up at her suddenly, and then stretched out his arms to her ; who caught her in them and held her; the Murdough who loved her, even as she loved him.

If this Murdough had melted a hundred times when confronted with the real one, he had at least grown again a hundred times when the other Murdough had removed himself. To Grania's mind—to her inmost feelings—he *was* the real Murdough, ten thousand proofs to the contrary notwithstanding. She had known him, seen him, recognised him twice ; once for ten minutes in the boat, again for half a minute the other evening when he called to her upon the rocks, and as for the rest of their time together it was nothing—*gusto*—not to be accounted.

That she was going to see this real Murdough became more and more of a conviction with every step she advanced. The emergency seemed to call him into existence.

It was now or never! He must and would be found equal to it, it was impossible to believe otherwise. Her faith grew stronger minute by minute, cried aloud in her ears, and pushed itself more and more strenuously upon her with every yard she advanced.

By the time she reached the villa it had become a certainty. As she came round the last corner and dropped into the little hollow —now a smoke-filled cauldron from which all detail had vanished—she could hear a sound of voices coming up from the invisible depths below. The house itself was completely lost to sight until she all but touched it, when it suddenly emerged, its massive three-cornered front rising white out of the dimness. She went hurriedly up to the door, which stood wide open. To the left lay the sea, half covering the rocks, invisible but audible, a dull grinding noise rising from time to time, then ceasing altogether. On the other side of the

house there were a couple of windows, broken, and patched with dirty bits of paper, but upon this side there were none, and never had been any, only three wide low steps which led up to the door, and which were of granite like the house itself, solid granite steps, the homes of flourishing sea spurreys and saxifrages, springing thickly from a dozen clefts and gaping fissures.

Something of the dignity of the type to which it belonged, and which had survived all vicissitudes, seemed to be stamped upon it to-day. Grania had always felt this dignity vaguely, and even now in her hurry a dim sensation of respect began to creep over her as she came within sight of those solidly-cut granite steps, that low, solidly-carved doorway. It was a tribute to a different order of things, to a different way of life from her own, a feeling increased, no doubt, by old Durane's tales of the bygone glory and

grandeur of its owner, but also inherent, born in her race, and not, therefore, easily dis-severed from it.

A sudden lull in the tumult of voices showed that her coming had been observed, and the next minute her heart gave a great bound and then seemed to stand still, for Murdough himself came out of the house and stood upon the top of the steps looking down at her.

For the last half-hour her thoughts had been rushing to meet him ; she had been mentally throwing her arms round him ; merging all their late differences, appealing to their old love, their old childish affection ; telling him all that she had not been able to find words to say the other evening ; telling him that she knew he would help her now in her great trouble, that he would come with her to Aranmore ; forcing him, in fact, by her urgency to do so. Instead, however,

of doing anything of the kind, a sudden feeling of diffidence came over her—a feeling of being there a suppliant, a beggar—of being at a disadvantage, she could not tell how or why. Probably it was something in their mutual attitude which suggested it. She had never in her own person known the feeling of being a suppliant, for in her time there had never been any gentry on Inishmaan, and she and Honor stood quite on the summit of such social altitudes as she was acquainted with. All the same, she did know it instinctively, and it arose without any bidding now. This fine young man standing at ease upon the top of the steps—at his own hall door, as it were—the girl—herself—with her petticoat over her head, appealing from below. Where had she seen those two figures that they seemed so familiar? She did not know, but it had the effect of changing all her previous thoughts, and bringing quite a new element of confusion into her mind.

Possibly Murdough was similarly affected by the accidental juxtaposition ; in any case, all situations of personal importance came naturally to him, and it was with none of the diffidence he had shown the other evening, on the contrary, with an air quite in accordance with this imaginary picture, that he asked her, in a tone of astonishment, what upon earth was the matter, and what had brought her out in such weather ? It was not a fit day for decent people to be out of their houses at all ; couldn't she see that for herself ?

Grania put her hand suddenly up to her head. A momentary vertigo seemed to assail her : a feeling of confusion, as if everything, herself and Murdough included, had got wrong, and were out of place. What had happened to them both ? she wondered.

‘Arrah, Murdoughleen, don’t you know ? Didn’t the child tell you ? Didn’t you get

the word from Phelim?' she stammered at length.

Murdough looked slightly embarrassed.

'Is it little Phelim Daly you mean?' he asked, in a tone of some hesitation. 'Well, yes, Grania; the child did come to me three hours ago, or maybe something better, I will not deny it. But it was not much I could understand of what he said, not much at all. It is no better than a natural he is, you know, and getting worse, I think, the creature, every day, God help him! His father was here at the time, and he said that it was all *gustho* he was talking, so he did—something about going to the big island to look for a priest. Arrah, my God! as if any man in his senses, or out of them, would think of going to the big island in such weather, no matter if it was for a priest, or for anything else! It was just waiting I was for the fog to clear a bit, and then it was up to your

house, Grania, I was going, to see if there was anything I could do for you. Yes, indeed, up to your very own house I was going, so you may believe me. But it would be walking over the cliffs, or into a hole in the rocks, I would be, if I was to try and go there now, so I just waited till it should clear. That was how it was, and no lie at all —ask the boys inside, and they will tell you. Arrah, how in God's name did you get here yourself at all, at all? It was the mad woman you were to come out in such weather. Is it your legs you want to break, or your neck, maybe? There has not been such a fog on Inishmaan not for this seven years back—Moriarty O'Flanagan was just saying so—not for this seven years back and more.'

Grania pushed her hair feverishly off her face, and let the petticoat she wore as a cloak drop from her shoulders. She felt hot and stifled. Murdough's words seemed to be

coming to her out of a dream ; his very personality, as he stood there, big, solid, and self-satisfied, seemed unreal. In this confusion her thoughts had come back to the one fixed and absolute reality—her errand ! That, let what would happen, must be carried out.

‘ It is dying Honor is, that is what she is doing,’ she said, simply. ‘ And it is a priest she must have before she can die—yes, a priest now, this very minute, Murdough ! And if you cannot go with me, it is someone else I must get, for it is not till the fog clears she can wait, for the fog may not clear, God knows, all the long night through, and it is not till the morning she will last, and she cannot die till she gets the priest, so she cannot. And that is why I have come to you, Murdough, because I do not think you would let my sister Honor die and no priest near her, you would not have the heart. And it is myself will go in the curragh with

you to Aranmore, only you must come too, you or someone, for I could not row it all by myself. And as for our not going out in the fog, sure, my God ! if we were to be drowned itself, the two of us, isn't that better any day of the week than for her to die and no priest near her—she that is such a real saint, and has always set her heart upon having one at the last? Arrah, 'tis only joking you are, I know ; you wouldn't refuse me, Murdough, you couldn't ! Haven't we two been always together since the time when we were a pair of little prechauns, no higher than a kish—always together, you and me, always? Sure, I wouldn't ask you, God knows, if there wasn't the need—the burning, burning need. Isn't your life dearer to me a hundred times than anyone else's, let alone my own? Arrah ! come, then, Murdough, dear, come ! Don't let us be wasting any more time. 'Tis *dying*, I tell you, she is

—dying fast. My God ! who knows but 'tis in the death-grips she is this minute up on the rocks yonder, and not a creature nigh her, only Molly Muldoon, and we two not even started yet !'

Murdough Blake was really to be pitied ! He was put in a most unpleasant position, one for which great allowance must be made. To begin with, he was excessively good-natured, a fact which even his most casual acquaintances knew well, and knew that nothing in the world was easier than to tease or coax him into doing anything that was required—so long as it did not entail too troublesome an effort upon his part. For Grania, too, if she had filled him several times of late with a sense of discomfort, if her claims and her ‘queerness’ had made her irksome and incomprehensible, he had at least a very old feeling of comradeship, one which went back to the very roots of life and

was as strong probably as any feeling he was capable of; which had been strengthened and warmed, too, into fresh energy by her unexpected generosity the day before. To refuse her, therefore, now, when she was so extremely urgent, was a real discomfort to him, a real worry and disturbance. Her will, moreover, was much the stronger of the two, and he experienced, therefore, a distinct physical inclination to yield to it and obey without further question. On the other hand, there was something about this particular task to which she was urging him that was peculiarly daunting and disquieting to his mind, the very thought of which sent cold shivers of discomfort through and through him. Had it been a question of taking out a boat in the middle of a storm, no matter how violent, his manhood would probably have risen to the occasion and he would have gone. He was no coward, certainly no commonplace

coward, and it was not, therefore, any prosaic fear of death in itself that held him back. It was something else ; something in the look, in the very touch and thought of this dank, close, unnatural whiteness that deterred, and as it were sickened, him by anticipation. He had a sense of its having come there for no good ; of its being the abode and hiding-place of who could tell what ugly, malignant spirits. A whole hoard of ancestral terrors, unexplained but unmistakable, awoke and stirred in his mind as he looked abroad from the steps, and thought of himself out there, adrift and helpless in a boat ; lost and smothered up in this horrible white blanket of a fog ; a prey to Heaven alone knew who or what ! A cold shiver ran through him from head to heels. No, he *could* not, he really *could* not go. Grania must be reasonable. To-morrow, or any time, even in the night, as soon as the fog cleared, he was ready to

start. Meanwhile Honor must abstain, for this one evening, from dying, or, if she would be so unreasonable as to die just now, well, die she must for once without a priest, for no priest could he, or any man, in his opinion, bring her in such weather. He set himself to put all this clearly before his petitioner. He was really exceedingly vexed to have to refuse her, but plainly there was no help for it.

‘Then, indeed and indeed, Grania, ’tis mortal sorry I am to go against you, so I am,’ he said, scratching his head with a vigorous gesture, less dignified, but probably a good deal more natural, than his previous airs of superiority. ‘And if it was any way possible—any way possible at all—to get to the big island, it is myself would go with you this minute, yes, indeed, and gladly, rather than disappoint you. Why not? it would be only a pleasure. But sure, my God! how can I, or any man in this mortal world, go

out in such weather? It is not in reason to ask such a thing. Merciful powers! only look at it over there!—thicker and thicker, and queerer and queerer, and more wicked-looking every minute it's getting, curling and gathering itself up into great heaps as if it was a mountain made of smoke—real Hell smoke, it is—yes, indeed, my faith and word—real Hell smoke, no other! God knows that I am not afraid, so you need not think *that*. God who is up there in glory knows whether I am afraid or not—right well He knows it, no one upon this earth better, or as well. But there are some things that it is not right for any man to attempt to do, no, nor be asked to do, either, so there are. Arrah! my faith and word, I wonder you can't see it for yourself? Sure, even if I were to get out the boat to oblige you, how in the name of reason could I find the way to Aranmore in such weather as this? Is it

by smelling at it with my nose I would find it? There is no seeing it, no, nor seeing anything else in such unnatural weather, so there is not, no more than if you were looking about you in the middle of a cave in the black inside heart of a mountain. And, if you did get there itself, no priest would come out with you, not one foot of it, so he would not! No, but he would tell you that you had no business to come out at all on such a day, that he would, for there is no knowing what may happen to people if they will do what they are not meant to do. It is straight up out of the boat in the middle of the bay a man would maybe find himself taken, and carried away God knows where, so he might, for there are things about on a day like this that it doesn't do to speak of, no, nor to think of either, as everyone that is sensible knows right well. And as for Honor dying, sure, what would ail her to die to-night? Isn't it

months upon months she has been at it, and why would she choose such weather as this to die in? 'Twouldn't be decent of her, so it wouldn't, and 'tis the decent woman she has always been! Arrah! then, be a good girl, Grania agra, and just go home and stay quietly in the house till to-morrow, and begorrah! by the first streak of day, or sooner, so long as it's anyway decent weather, I'll come to you, and we'll go off for the priest, sure enough, and bring him back with us in the curragh. Won't that content you, Grania, dheelish?—say it will, and go home quickly, there's a good girl, for, indeed, 'tis wickeder and wickeder looking it's getting every minute.'

But Grania's face was set like a flint. She had picked up the petticoat and gathered it about her shoulders again, her whole air showing a determination utterly defiant of all blandishments.

‘It is to look for Teige O’Shaughnessy I am going now,’ she said briefly. ‘And if I do not find him, then I am going to Aranmore by myself, for I will not let my sister Honor die and never a priest near her, so I will not, God help me! ’

Murdough felt the natural displeasure of a man who has taken great pains to explain a matter in the clearest possible manner and who finds that all his explanations have been simply thrown away. He was annoyed, too, by the mention of Teige’s name.

‘Then it is not Teige O’Shaughnessy you will find, for it was over to Allinera he went this morning with his pack, and it is not back he will be able to get home through this fog, the poor *boccach*, I am thinking,’ he said contemptuously. ‘And as for your going alone to Aranmore in a curragh this night you will not do *that* either, I am thinking, so you will not. If you do, ’tis the mad woman

you are—the mad woman out and out !’ And he turned upon his heel to go back into the house.

‘Then it is the mad woman I am, sure and certain,’ she answered, ‘for it *is* going I am, and so good-night to you, Murdough Blake.’

There was a mutual pause. Both had now said all that they had got to say. Both had reached a platform from which there was no receding. Murdough was absolutely determined that, let what would happen, nothing should tempt him to stir abroad upon such an evening. Grania was still more absolutely determined that, come what would, a priest for Honor she must and would get. If Murdough would not help her, then Teige should. If Teige proved to be really from home, then she would go by herself, and find her way across the sound as best she could. If every man in Inishmaan was afraid of the

fog, *she* was not afraid. Honor should not die without a priest. That fact, amongst much that was dim and confused, stood out absolutely fixed and certain.

She turned round resolutely, therefore, to go, and then—and then—she turned back again! She was torn in two. Was this the end? the very, very end? Were they parting like this? That it was no everyday parting, not even any everyday quarrel, of that she felt absolutely certain. Was it, *could* it be the end of all things? No, it couldn't be! she told herself. It was not possible! Again her faith in Murdough—the real, the invisible Murdough, rose—rose, too, in the very teeth of evidence. It was *not* possible, she decided; he was joking, she felt sure of it. She turned therefore; hesitated; went a few steps onward; then again stopped, and again hesitated.

Suddenly she turned resolutely back with

a bound, rushed up the three broad steps of the villa, and stood beside him in the porch on the top of them. It was a tolerably deep porch, and the fog, besides, was now so dense that as they stood there they were to all intents and purposes as isolated as if no other human beings existed in the world. Although there were three men within a very few yards of them, the sense of solitude was for the moment as complete as though they had stood alone together in the centre of the great Sahara. They were encompassed hand and foot by the whiteness; two ghostly figures, cut off and hidden away in a world of their own—hidden, to a great degree, even from one another. For Grania, certainly, there existed no other creatures at the time save only herself and Murdough. Only herself and Murdough, and they were parting; parting, yet for the moment together, for the moment still within reach, touch, and grasp of one another.

The result was that, almost before he had realised that she had returned and that she was standing beside him, Murdough felt two arms about his neck, clinging tighter, tighter still, pressing about it in a convulsive, panic-stricken embrace, close and clinging as that of the very fog without, only warm, very warm, and very human ; desperation in every touch of it, anger, too, but above all love—a love that could kill its object, but that would never fail it ; could never entirely cease to believe in it.

‘ Och, Murdough ! Murdough ! Murdough ! ’ she whispered, and her breath fanned his cheek fiercely. ‘ Och, Murdough, look at me ! Murdougheen, speak to me ! Is there never one bit of love for me in all that big strong body of yours ? Never one bit of love for your poor Grania, that’s loved you, and none but you, all her life long, ever since she was a little bit of a girsha ? Sure, heart of my

heart, wouldn't I die any day in the week gladly just to please you, or any night of it for that matter either, if you asked me? and is there nothing you'd do for me in return—nothing? nothing? Arrah! say you'll come with me to Aranmore—only say the word—say you'll not refuse me. Sure you couldn't, Murdough, you *couldn't*, let me go out alone into the strange wild night without you? Arrah, say you couldn't, dear; say it! 'Deed and you needn't say it, for I wouldn't believe it of you, not if anyone swore it, so I wouldn't. Och, *ma slanach!* *ma slanach!* who have I in the wide world to look to but you? My God! 'tis mad, out and out, I think I am going, for my heart feels bursting in the inside of me.'

Murdough was shocked, more than shocked, he was startled, positively scared and terrified by such an unlooked-for demonstration, such utterly unheard-of vehemence. If Grania had gone mad, he certainly had

not done so, and one proof of his sanity was that he was intensely conscious of the presence of those two other men gathered round the cracked punch-bowl not far off, as well as of the presence of Shan Daly, who was probably hidden away in some obscure corner of the building. He could not see any of them certainly, and therefore presumably they could not see him. Still, they might *hear*; a thought which filled him with acute discomfort. Had Grania really gone mad, he asked himself; it seemed to be the only possible explanation. Lapses into drunkenness were trifles, a few other obvious slips from the path of absolute rectitude were customary, and therefore forgivable, but such conduct as this was unheard-of, was absolutely unprecedented and inconceivable! His sense of decorum was stirred to its very depths.

Rapidly disengaging himself from her, he

drew her hastily out of the porch, down the steps, and round the nearest corner of the building, where there was a sort of weedy ditch or hollow which ran between the wall of the villa and the bank, ending in a kind of kitchen-midden, made up of all the loose rubbish which had accumulated there from time to time, and beyond which a small, disused back-door opened. Here they again confronted one another.

Either his look of dismay had aroused Grania to a sense of the enormity of her conduct, or the mere break in the chain of her ideas had brought her back to everyday life, in any case, she was now blushing hotly. The fiery fit was past. She felt beaten down and subdued by her own vehemence. All she wanted now was to get away—to get away quickly, and to be alone.

‘Then, indeed and indeed, I don’t know what ails me this evening, so I do not,

Murdough,' she said in a tone of confused apology. "'Tis the weather, maybe! God knows it is the queerest, most unnatural sort ever was, and seems to be driving one out of one's senses.' She paused; then went on: 'Maybe 'tis right you are about not going out in it, dear, and I'll just step back to the house, as you bid me, and, please God, I'll find Honor something easier, and she'll hold out till the morning, and if not, why, I must just go look for Teige. Anyway, God won't desert her, come what will, I'm sure. He couldn't, could He? He never would have the heart to do such a thing, and she such a real saint!'

She paused again, and looked at him beseechingly, then added timidly, "'Tisn't out and out angry you are with me, dear, are you? Arrah! Murdough, it wasn't me did it at all, at all, you know, only the weather —just the weather and the fear I was in of

Honor dying without the good words at the last.'

For the third time she paused, and stood looking at him, trying hard to see his face in the fog. But his face was a mere blur, and he himself remained absolutely silent. This silence was so extraordinary, so unprecedented upon his part, that it filled her with a sense of awe, both of awe and of self-dismay. After waiting a minute, therefore, she added, still more humbly, 'Good-bye, dear. God knows 'tis sorry I am for vexing you. It won't happen again, Murdough—never again, dear; never !' and she turned to go.

For the first time that evening an unaccountable wave of irresolution swept over Murdough. He was very angry with her, excessively angry; ashamed too, and embarrassed to the last degree; nay, he was inclined, as has been said, to think that she really must have gone mad, since no one who was

not mad would behave in such a way. All the same, something new seemed to be stirring within him. He, too, felt ‘queer.’ Could it really be the weather, or, if not, what was it? The effect in any case was that he felt suddenly disinclined to let her go. A sudden wish came over him to stop her, to hear again what she had to say; to quarrel with her, perhaps, but not to part with her so suddenly. He made a step forward. She was still within easy reach; had only gone, in fact, a yard or two up the bank. It was upon the tip of his tongue to call after her, to ask her to stop: to say that, perhaps, after all, he *would* go with her, since she had so set her heart upon it—piece of folly as it was!—that in any case he would go back with her as far as the cabin, and see for himself how Honor was getting on, whether matters were really so desperate as she asserted or not. He had made a couple of steps forward, had

opened his lips, his hand was actually outstretched, when out of the dark doorway in the wall behind him another hand suddenly emerged, a lean hand with hairy, clutching fingers, the arm belonging to it clad in a sleeve so ragged that it literally fell away from it in filthy, sooty-coloured ribbons. This other hand caught Murdough's and held it fast for a minute. Only for a minute, but when it had again released its hold Grania was already out of reach, half-way up the side of the bank, and nothing was to be seen far or near but the white all-encompassing shroud of the fog.

CHAPTER IV

THAT shroud was whiter and more encompassing than ever as she made her way back to the cabin. Its effect upon her was not, however, now to excite, but to deaden and subdue. The long struggle with Murdough ; the failure of her appeal to him ; her own, even to herself, unexpected and unaccountable behaviour at the end of their meeting ; the dismay with which he had received that behaviour ; all these had combined to produce a reaction. She felt thoroughly beaten down now, thoroughly sobered and ashamed. No one on Inishmaan, no girl, possibly anywhere, had ever behaved in such a manner before, no one certainly within the range of her experience

had ever been so lost to all propriety and decency. A sense of being a sort of pariah was strong upon her as she crept back with difficulty over the fog-filled fissures, and stole noiselessly into the cabin, wishing only to hide herself there from all eyes. Her new self-mistrust even went so far as to include a belief that her impression about Honor's danger had probably been quite wrong, that she would prove to be no worse than usual, and that it would therefore do perfectly well to think about getting the priest for her in the morning when the fog should have dispersed. That, as Murdough said, was the decent thing to do, and no doubt Honor would do whatever was most decent and most proper.

Unfortunately, so valuable a lesson as to the advantages of being always perfectly decent and reasonable was not destined to be enforced that evening. On the contrary,

Grania had no sooner opened the cabin door, and cast her eyes upon the bed, than she saw that a great change for the worse had taken place during her absence. Honor was sitting upright, propped by every movable thing in the house—propped, too, by Molly Muldoon's willing arms—but panting, white, and exhausted, apparently all but gone, so nearly gone, indeed, that it seemed to Grania, as she stood there upon the threshold, that each of these hardly-won breaths must be the last, that the end had positively come. She caught her own breath and sank instinctively upon her knees with a feeling of the imminence of that end.

But Honor had seen her. For a moment a gleam of intense hope lit up her face. She looked behind her eagerly towards the door, expecting evidently to see a black figure following her, that figure for whose coming her whole soul had for hours back been going

out in an agony of petition, for whose coming she was struggling so desperately to keep alive. There was no black figure following, however, and after a minute a new look, first of intense disappointment, then of an agonised effort at submission, came into her face, and she beckoned her sister over to her, speaking in a low gasping whisper.

‘Arrah, Grania child, don’t be destroying yourself . . . breaking the heart in your body with trying to do what you . . . can’t do. Sure ’tis killing yourself I see you are! The fog . . . yes, I know . . . Molly Muldoon told me! Arrah, can’t I see with my own eyes how the house is filled with it . . . in at all the cracks and down the chimney! Saints in glory, ’tis terrible wicked-looking weather, and how could Father Tom come out such an evening if you did get to . . . Aranmore itself?’ She paused, breathless and panting. ‘The Holy Mother will stand between me and . . .

and all harm,' she then whispered painfully.
‘She’ll know it wasn’t my . . . fault. She’ll
know ’twas the fog . . . and the men afeard . . .
as . . . who could blame them? She’ll speak
the word for me . . . I know she will . . .
she’ll . . . speak . . . the . . . word for me.’

Again she paused. Suddenly her eyes turned upon Grania.

‘Arrah, my bird, don’t be fretting yourself,’ she murmured tenderly. ‘Don’t I know you would have got him for me if you could?’ Then, with another great effort, ‘Take heart, my bird, take heart; ’tisn’t long I’ll be in it, you know, to be disappointed, and whether or not—sure I can bear it, honey sweet; I can bear it, I tell you; bear it . . . easy.’

But a fresh impulse had now seized hold of Grania. Her momentary apathy was gone. A new determination was setting her eyes ablaze.

‘You *shall* have him, Honor, and he *shall*

come to you, if I have to bring him swimming through the water after me, so he shall,' she exclaimed fiercely. 'Don't be afraid, dear; keep up your poor heart a little, a very little longer, sister darling, and he'll be with you.'

She kissed her hastily, and dashed out of the door again, turning this time in the direction of the O'Shaughnessys' cabin. Maybe Teige would be back, after all. Most probably, almost certainly, he would be back by this time. Anyhow, with Teige or without Teige, to Aranmore and to Father Tom that night somehow or other she would get.

CHAPTER V

SHE hurried desperately on over the flagging, heedless of the cracks, but keeping always upon the same level which must in time, she knew, bring her to the shore exactly opposite the O'Shaughnessys' cabin. The fog was too thick now to dream of keeping to any path, but the levels on Inishmaan are always the same, so that by following any one of them you are sure to reach a given point sooner or later. From time to time she came to some unusually wide fissure, and had to scramble across as best she could, the edges feeling like ice under her feet, or like some sort of half-melted substance, such as wax or spermaceti. The short thick thorn bushes

growing out of the rocks brushed her ankles, and now and then she found herself suddenly out upon the cliff-like edge of the step, and had to work her way back to where the terrace broadened, and the walking was comparatively safe.

At last she knew by the general look and touch of the rocks that she must be getting close to the narrow tongue of land which led to the smaller islet. This was the most dangerous part of the way, and she stood still a moment, therefore, to make sure of her bearings, before clambering down to the shore and thence on to the tongue of land.

The fog was absolutely impervious now. It was impossible to see more than a few inches ahead. Every now and then a puff of wind would come and partially clear it for a moment, when the whirling vapour would give her the sense of being surrounded by

smoke, so wildly did it fly around her. Then all would close up again, and a sense of suffocation encompass her, through which colder breaths blew fitfully, coming from where rain pools lay amongst the rocks, or where some draught, caught from the sea and entangled in the surf, rose to the upper levels.

Making her way cautiously to the edge of the step, she let herself drop on to the next below. She was now upon the second of the eight steps or platforms of which Inishmaan consists, and there was therefore only one more between her and high-water mark. This one, however, was much more broken and littered with fallen blocks than the upper ones, so that it took her a long time to cross it and longer still to make sure of where she was. At last she got to the edge, and having scrambled down, not without several slips, from not knowing where to set

her feet, she reached the bottom, and was thus upon the actual shore at last.

The tide, she calculated, was by this time half-way in, so that it was necessary to make haste in order to secure Teige, and bring him back to where the curragh was kept. The tongue of rock, at all times narrow and slippery, was to-day all but impassable. Twice she fell, and found herself clinging by her hands to the weed-covered top, her feet and nearly her whole body dangling over the edge, where there was no foothold whatever, and where she could just discern the hungry greenish swell rising noiselessly up, up, up, rising stealthily, as if determined to catch her unawares.

Almost upon hands and knees she succeeded in reaching the other side, and clambered up the final bit of track which led to the cabin. It was so squat and so low that had the island been much larger it

would have been easy to miss it altogether. As she came near, it looked more like some shaggy old beast crouched there in the hollow than a house. No light showed upon the side facing her, but when she reached the door she could see a pale pink splinter, evidently of firelight, stealing out from below. She knocked twice loudly, her heart beating; hoping, praying that Teige himself would come to the door and open to her. No one came near the door, however, although she could hear someone moving to and fro inside, someone who was evidently quite unaware of that clamorous appeal so close at hand. Grania's heart sank, for it was clear now that Teige was still from home, and only deaf-and-dumb Biddy left in charge, who would not only be utterly useless herself, but would probably not even be able to tell her where Teige was likely to be found.

She lifted the latch of the door. It opened easily, and she went in. The old woman had her back turned, and did not therefore at first perceive her entrance. It was fairly clear inside, showing that the door had not been opened since the fog had grown so thick. Grania stood for a moment upon the threshold, blinking at the firelight, which seemed painfully hot and red after the unnatural white world she had left outside.

Biddy, dressed as usual from head to heels in red flannel, and still utterly unconscious of anyone's entrance, seemed to be engaged in chasing something or somebody round the cabin, uttering queer, inarticulate cries under her breath as she did so. Now she would make a dart at some object, seated apparently on a beam above the hearth, next, seizing the corner of her petticoat, she would turn and flap vigorously behind her, as if she were being followed

and pulled by someone at once very small and very persistent, giving utterance as she did so to scolding or remonstrating sounds, such as a nurse might use to some unusually troublesome child.

So odd was the old creature's behaviour, so utterly unexplained by anything in sight—for not even a cat or a chicken was in the cabin—that Grania, for all her haste, stood still a moment, staring at her as she hopped from side to side of the narrow space. She had seen Biddy behave queerly before, but never quite so queerly as this. Suddenly her reputed powers of seeing and holding communication with the *sidh* came into her mind, and a chill sensation shot over her. Was there *really* something in the cabin that she could not see? And if so, whereabouts was it, and what was it like? Biddy, meanwhile, in one of her turnings, had caught sight of her visitor standing ghost-like by the

door, and uttered a sudden scream, the odd, discordant, hardly-human scream of the deaf and dumb. Grania thereupon stepped forward to explain her errand, the old woman, after a moment's stare of unrecognition, beginning to nod and duck as she perceived who her visitor was. The girl looked hastily round for something of Teige's, so as to explain whom she was in search of. She could see nothing but a battered high hat hanging to a hook in the wall which had formerly belonged to dumb Denny, but which his nephew sometimes wore when he went to Aranmore to chapel. This hat she took down, and held towards the old woman with an interrogative gesture, pointing at the same time towards the door.

Whether she was understood or not it was not easy to tell. In any case, Biddy's information was not of any very detailed or available character. Dropping down upon the

stool which stood beside the hearth, and throwing her withered arms over her head, she uttered a wild cry, something between a croak and a scream, which was intended to mean ‘Gone! Gone!’ an ejaculation she had often made use of since her brother died, and which apparently conveyed to her mind all that sense of departure, of loneliness, and of desertion which we articulate people employ so many, and often such inadequate, words to convey.

Evidently it was useless to hope for further information, so Grania turned to go. Upon opening the door a solid, white wall of fog rose in front of her, one in which every detail was lost, and which it needed some little resolution to penetrate, so opaque and impervious looking was it. Turning for an instant before the fog again swallowed her up, she saw that old Biddy had already forgotten her visit. With eyes fixed upon a

spot a little way above her head, she had risen from her stool and was stealthily approaching that spot, evidently with the intention of pouncing upon whoever was seated there before he or she could hope to perceive her approach and make off. Against the dim background of the cabin the single red fantastic figure lit by the firelight made a curiously vivid dot of colour, which seemed to hang for several minutes before Grania's eyes as she pursued her way across the fog-filled fissures.

CHAPTER VI

THE disappointment had no effect whatever upon her determination of somehow or other getting to Father Tom that night. There was no one else upon Inishmaan whom she could appeal to with any hope of success, and therefore she did not think of appealing to anyone else. She would go by herself, and she would go at once. Her course was now at least a simple one.

She had to return in the first instance to their own cabin to get out a pair of old oars which hung in the cow-house, but she did not intend to see Honor again, certainly not to let Honor see her. The bare thought of, for a second time that evening, meeting the

look of mute dismay which had met her after her first unsuccessful quest went through her like a knife. Anything would be better, she felt, than to see that again ; anything, anything.

She stole accordingly to the cow-house like a thief, and, having got down the oars, started again for the landing-place. Moonyeen turned her spotted head and lowed reproachfully, which brought her back at once to see if there was enough for her to eat, and she hastily shook down a couple of armfuls of weedy grass, cut a few days before in the clefts, and left it near her. That would do till the morning. It was all the cut grass she had by her. To-morrow she must not forget to go and cut some more, she reflected as she did so.

For the second time she had got as far as the old boulder, and for the second time she paused and looked back. Though only a

few yards away the cabin was already invisible; the fog making it a mere blur, like some phantom cabin seen in a dream. A sudden intense yearning came over Grania to see the inside of it once again, and a yet greater yearning for one, only one more sight of Honor's face. She *must* see that, she felt; she could not and would not go out into that big hungry sea—to disappear, perhaps, and be lost for ever by herself in the fog—without at least once again peeping at Honor as she slept.

She stole back accordingly and looked in. Molly Muldoon, crouched up into a shapeless blue heap by the bed, was already nodding drowsily, a few inches of puckered forehead, the top of a religiously white cap, the only portions of her distinguishable. Whether Honor slept or not it was impossible to say. Her eyelids were down, and the white face below them might have been a dead woman's

face. There was a slight heaving under the sheet, that was all.

Grania stood there and gazed. Her eyes seemed rooted to that narrow square of brown wall and that white face in the dimmest corner of it. Both belonged to her as nothing else in this whole wide world belonged or ever could belong. She must not delay, however, she knew. Time was slipping on; what little light was left was rapidly going. She stole out noiselessly, and the cabin door shut remorselessly behind her. Reaching the big boulder, she again picked up the oars which she had left there, laid them across her shoulders, and turned hurriedly down the track.

It was easy enough to find the way as long as she was in the gully, for there was no turning there to the right or to the left. Beyond it, however, everything—track, rocks, and fog-filled air—looked exactly alike. The oars too prevented her feeling her way as

before with her hands, and it was not for a long time and until after many stumbles that she at last reached the small semicircular sweep of sand upon which the curragh was kept.

Just as she did so something bounced suddenly against her foot, making her start violently and spring backwards. She had once or twice heard an odd patterning noise behind her on her way downhill, but everything seemed odd and unaccountable that evening, so that she had given no particular heed to it. Now she looked down panic-stricken, a prey to terror, all the fears awakened by Biddy O'Shaughnessy's proceedings astir again, and leaping within her. It was not until she had dropped one of the oars, and that a violent mew of pain had come up from the ground at her feet, that she discovered that the object was nothing more terrifying than their own yellow cat. What

had induced the creature, which never by any chance left the cabin, which had never followed her in its life, or shown her the smallest sign of affection, which was notoriously a mere mass of greed and self-indulgence, to select that particular evening for following her all this way, coming down to the shore, which, like most of its race, it detested, is not easy to explain. Grania, at all events, made no attempt to explain it. She stooped hastily to pick up the oar, and as she did so stroked the creature's back, a vague feeling of comfort coming to her from its presence. Her solitude did not seem to be quite so solitary now that something belonging to them was with her, even if it was only their own ill-tempered yellow cat. There was no response to her caress beyond that the cat did not, as usual, show any inclination to scratch in return, merely sidled noiselessly past her, and then ran a few paces ahead, its

brilliant tail lifted high in air as if to show the way.

As the event proved, Grania was destined to have another, if not a much more efficient, auxiliary. When she had found the curragh, a matter which, small as the space was, took her some time, she began at once to push it towards the sea. A ridge of sand or up-sticking point of rock just in front caught it and delayed her, and she went forward to try and clear it away. She was bending down upon her hands and knees, trying to find out its exact position and size, when as she raised her face she suddenly found herself confronted with another face nearly upon the same level as her own—a ghostly face, with great, widely-staring eyes—gazing straight at her through a foot or two of fog.

Again her fears sprang up, and again they were allayed, this time as the familiar small features and big pale blue eyes of little Phelim

Daly gradually became defined, the boy sidling silently up to her as if for protection, and then, like the cat, trotting silently on a step or two in advance, and turning round as though to watch whether she were following.

She asked him what had happened? Where he had been all day? Why, when Murdough wouldn't come, he hadn't tried to find Teige? What his father had done to him? Whether he had beaten him; and how in the end he had managed to escape and to find her out? He made no answer, however, to any of these questions, beyond turning and again fixing his strange blue eyes upon her with a wistful, far-away look; a look full of doubt; one which seemed to ask her in his turn what was the matter; what they were both doing down there upon such a night; why they were out at all; what it all meant? It was an even less responsible, and more far-away look than his usually were, and

seemed to suggest that something had happened in the course of the day yet further to disturb and unsettle his always more or less distraught wits.

There was no time to press the matter, and she turned, therefore, to renew her efforts to get the boat to sea, going behind it and pushing as hard as she could. Suddenly the impediment, whatever it was, gave way ; the curragh slid rapidly forward ; its black bow splashed into the invisible water. Another push from behind, and it was afloat.

While she was still pushing it, before it was yet wholly afloat, and before she had even made up her mind whether she was going to take Phelim with her or not, the yellow cat had run on ahead, and had sprung into the boat with an air of decision. This seemed to settle the matter, and they all got in together ; an odd boatload surely ! At the very last moment one of the crew, however,

changed its mind. Perhaps it was Phelim's presence, for whom it had always shown a particular aversion ; perhaps it was the rocking of the boat as Grania pushed her oar against the sand. Anyhow, with a sudden demoniac mew of fury, the yellow cat sprang up again ; darted frantically, like a thing possessed, from side to side, up and down the thwarts, one after the other ; then up the stern, availing itself of Phelim, who sat there, as a bridge, and, scratching his bare legs viciously as it did so, sprang to the shore again and raced frantically away up the spit of sand, its yellow tail flaring for a second like a small meteor before it vanished into the darkness.

Phelim uttered a cry of dismay, and sprang up as if he also were about to escape. Grania, however, called to him to stay still ; then, as the only use she could put him to, desired him to go to the other end of the boat and

look out carefully, and if he saw anything ahead of them, no matter what, except water and fog, to call to her at once.

Apparently he understood, for he nodded twice, going over and squatting down in his usual frog-like fashion at the bow, holding on there to the two sides, as he peered into the foot or so of air and water, which was all that was visible ahead of them. She meanwhile had settled steadily down to the task of rowing. It was exactly like trying to row blindfold, but she knew so well every inch of the way, every rock, shoal, and sandbank, and had so often gone along it in the dark, as well as the light, that it seemed hardly possible to her that she could go far wrong.

The first notice from her watcher at the bow came, however, before they had even got clear of their own island. She thought she was upon the usual track, quite away

from the dangerous rocks of Portacurra, the furthermost point to westward—that she was even allowing more space than was usual or necessary—when all at once a cry from Phelim startled her, and she stopped rowing.

Looking behind she at first saw nothing but the black beak-like bow of the boat, and the boy's figure huddled beside it, everything else being a mere blur, but as far as she could make out clear. She thought that he had simply made a mistake, but with another long-drawn cry he turned and pointed downwards towards the water. Leaning forward and looking closer, she then saw, to her surprise, that it was quite true. Greenish points were rising dimly in every direction, some of them within an inch or two of the surface, and beyond these again were other and larger masses, formless as the very fog itself, but which could be nothing but rocks, the barnacle-coated knife-edged rocks of

Portacurra, a touch from one of which would tear a hole in the curragh's canvas sides and sink it like a stone.

Backing cautiously, she managed to escape without any contact. Only just in time, however; another stroke of the oars, two seconds' more delay, and Phelim's warning would have come too late.

They were now out in Gregory's Sound, and the only serious danger therefore was of missing the great island altogether, and rowing straight away into the Atlantic.

After so bad a start Grania had lost confidence in her own powers of finding the way. There was nothing to be done, however, but to row steadily on, and, above all, to avoid turning the boat round. She shut her eyes accordingly, as the safest way of avoiding this, and rowed her hardest, every muscle in her body bound and strung to the task. If she missed the right way past Illaunalee,

over the bar and so into Killeany Bay, she was resolved to run ashore anywhere, no matter where, and, leaving the curragh to its fate, push on with Phelim to Father Tom's house, and trust to getting the loan of another curragh to bring them back to Inishmaan.

Half an hour passed thus, and then an hour. Overhead, the white curtain was thicker than ever; yet it seemed to her that it was a little lighter now than it had been when they were starting, showing that it was less the time of day than the sheer density of the fog that had made it so impossible to see upon their own island. On and on she rowed; still on and on, always on and on. Already it appeared to her that she had been rowing quite long enough to have crossed Gregory's Sound, here little more than a mile wide, and she hoped, therefore, that she had got upon the right track, and would soon be passing the straggling line of sandbanks which

surround Illaunalee. Odd-looking vortexes and currents were visible now in the dimness overhead ; mysterious maelstroms, gazing up, instead of down, into which, the careering fragments might be seen circling round and round ; breaking capriciously off, joining together again, gathering into interlaced patterns, sweeping up and down, expanding, converging ; all this movement going on along the edge of a sort of pit, scooped as it were out of the very air itself. Suddenly, while she was looking at it, the whole thing would close up, and a new vortex or funnel break out in an altogether different place.

Grania was beginning to get drowsy over her task, what with the weight of the air and with the pressure of her own troubled thoughts. Her drowsiness did not perceptibly slacken the activity of her muscles, but she rowed more and more mechanically, the rhythm of her own movements seeming to

produce a dream-like effect upon her brain. Thoughts, or rather dreams, of Honor visited her from time to time, thoughts, too, or dreams, of Murdough, both equally broken, confused, fragmentary. As far as her own sensations went, she might have been rowing there the whole live-long night, so benumbing and sleep-like was that torpor. How long she really had been rowing she could not in the least have told, but her thoughts or her dreams were suddenly cut short—cut into as it were—by another wild cry from Phelim. This time it was much more than a cry, it was an actual scream; a shrill, discordant screech, such as some animals give when they are in the intensest throes of terror. Grania on her side started violently, and turned round. The boy, she found, had leaped up from his seat, and was standing at his full height, waving his thin arms frantically in the air, calling to her, and pointing

directly above his head, with gesticulations violent enough to all but swamp the frail craft they were in. Another moment and it seemed as if he would leap clean overboard from sheer panic.

Looking up she, too, saw what he had seen, and was almost equally startled. Apparently immediately above them, in reality a little way ahead, one of those same aërial funnels had just opened, and within the comparatively clear space of its air-filled hollow could be seen, not merely the careering particles of fog circling round and round, but something else, something that did not circle or move at all, a few inches of wind-tattered grass, a few inches more of bare splintered rock. There they hung, apparently in mid-air, their beginnings and endings alike invisible, but this much clearly discernible, a startling vision in itself, and a plain proof, moreover, that they were not

approaching Illaunalee, or anywhere even remotely near it.

Where were they? Grania asked herself in dismay. Were they moving along the base of the south side of Aranmore, where the cliffs rise constantly higher till they are crowned at last by Dun Aengus, or had she passed the mouth of Killeany Bay altogether, and were they edging therefore along the lower and more broken cliffs upon the north side of the island? She did not know; she could not even remotely guess!

In any case the only thing to be done was to get away once more into open water, and with a rapid movement of the oars she accordingly backed the curragh, forgetting for the moment little Phelim, who, staggering helplessly, fell violently forward, only just saving himself by clutching with both hands at the side of the boat, where he hung for a while, head downwards, doubled in two, his

shoulders and the front part of his body all but touching the water.

It seemed to be the last straw needed to overset his already shattered nerves and panic-stricken wits! From that moment he evidently gave himself up for lost. Gathering himself back by degrees to his former place he began to whimper and cry aloud, rubbing his hands up and down his poor starved legs, moaning over their bruises and talking rapidly and incoherently, now to himself, now to the sea, or to the planks in front of him. Once in the middle of these moanings and mutterings he suddenly looked up and uttered another prolonged screech of terror, whereupon Grania stopped abruptly in her rowing and looked round. This time, however, he had screamed at nothing. He was incapable, in fact, of serving any longer as watcher. Reality and unreality had become one to him. Like some utterly fear-maddened animal he

continued to moan and whimper helplessly, gazing out into the fog-filled space in front of him, but not seeing anything, even if there happened to be anything there to see ; his big, prominent blue eyes staring blankly, and as blind eyes stare, over the edge of the curragh as it floated on and on, under the invisible but always near presence of the great cliffs ; on and on ; yes, but where to ? to what goal ? towards what sort of a landing-place ? Neither of them knew ; she very little more than he.

CHAPTER VII

FOR Grania had by this time utterly lost count of her bearings. To hinder the curragh from turning round, to hinder it from running upon the rocks, and so getting immediately swamped, was all that she could attempt to do. She paddled along slowly, therefore, trying from time to time to make out where she was, but always, as she knew, failing utterly; failing to the point of not even knowing whether she was at that moment facing the mouth of Killeany Bay or turning her back upon it.

That last point soon decided itself, for the cliffs were evidently getting steeper. Despite, too, the dead calm, unruffled by even so much

as a breath, despite the leaden shroud which pressed down everywhere upon the water, low thuds made themselves audible from time to time, as the slow, sulky swell rolled in to the shore, impeded, apparently, by the thick, lifeless air, yet reaching it in the end, and sinking down in a succession of slow, monotonous washes. From the general look of the water around, it began to be clear to Grania that they must by this time have got amongst some of the outlying reefs, for there were rocks now to right of them, as well as to left. The tide, too, was running swiftly, and kept drawing them insensibly shorewards. Twice she caught a glimpse of a pale green monster only just in time to avoid running full upon it. Ought she to go on, or ought she to stop? Ought she to try to turn round? or what ought she to do? she asked herself.

The question was soon settled. Suddenly, without the slightest warning from Phelim,

without a hint of any kind from without, there came a startling crash. Another and another followed. Then came a worse sound, the sickening sound of ripping and tearing ; the sharp ripping of tarred canvas. This time they were full upon a rock, which had pierced them through and through, as a pin might pierce a child's balloon. In another moment, it is true, they were afloat again, but it was too late. Water was now pouring in wildly through a hole in the side. Already the bottom of the boat was half full. In the first impulse of the moment Grania had snatched up her flannel petticoat and stuffed it into the hole, holding it there with both hands as she felt the pressure growing greater and greater. It was like trying, however, to stop the course of a river—hopeless to absurdity. To get out somewhere, no matter where ; to reach the shore if possible ; if not, to reach some rock ; to get the boy, at

any rate, out, was the only thing to be attempted.

She looked wildly round, straining her eyes distractedly through the impenetrable, blinding whiteness. Presently another pale green monster loomed slowly up—part of the same rock, possibly, they had already struck upon, possibly of another. In any case it was flat on the top, and fairly easy, apparently, to scramble on to; rose, too, as far as she could make out, above the high-water line; nay, might even be joined by other rocks to the base of the cliffs. It was a hopeless-looking chance of escape, still it was the only one that offered itself, and accordingly she drove the boat full against the side of the rock, calling out loudly as she did so to Phelim to jump out and climb up it.

Roused by her tone of command the boy obeyed, apparently without knowing why,

clambered over the side of the boat, caught at the rock, clutching hold of the seaweed which fringed it, and hanging there for a minute or two as a small sloth might hang to the bough of a tree. At the same moment the other end of the curragh, already half full of water, was jerked lower still by the movement, and the displacement, slight as it was, of his weight, and sank deeply in the sea, and in so doing was pushed several feet farther from the rock.

Seeing the boy clear, and knowing that in another few minutes the boat must in any case fill, Grania took her hands away from the hole, through which the water instantly spurted upwards in a solid gush. Summoning all her strength, she, too, made a great effort to try and attain the rock, upon the side of which Phelim was now crouched, but the already nearly submerged curragh gave her a poor foothold to spring from, and she

missed it by a foot or more, and sank immediately into deep water.

The tide was running fast ; there was no other landing-place of any kind ; nothing to climb upon ; nothing to catch hold of. There were rocks in plenty around her, but they were most of them inches deep in water, a stray, glimmering, point appearing from time to time, like a ghost, and then vanishing again. She was caught, too, like a straw in the grip of that slow, seemingly gentle swell, which swept her hither and thither, now a little nearer to the rock, now impossibly, hopelessly, far away from it again. Clearly unless help came, the end would not be very long delayed.

Roused by the splash and by the sharp ringing cry she had uttered as she fell, Phelim half turned round, then climbed a little higher up, helping himself by the sea-weeds, until he reached the top, which was

quite grey and dry. Here, getting upon his hands and knees, he stared down into the waste of water below him, and at the struggle going on within it. He was evidently incapable of anything further, however. Mind and body were alike paralysed—alike unable to respond to any call from without. He scarcely seemed to know what was occurring, retaining only by sheer unreasoning instinct his grip upon the foothold he had secured. What dim ideas travelled through his brain as he lay crouching there it is impossible to say, but as far as help went, any of the gulls swooping overhead, any of the seaweed-covered spider-legged crabs scuttling in and out of the crannies below him, were of as much avail as he.

Either Grania knew this or she may have even forgotten his presence, for she made no effort to induce him to come to her aid. She

was too young, however, and too vigorous, to surrender the contest without at least a struggle for her life. Twice she neared the rock, striking out bravely through the water, though she was unable to swim, and twice the current pulled her back again, sweeping her farther and farther towards the open sea, but so lightly, so buoyantly, as it were playfully, toying capriciously with her as a child or a young animal plays with something that it has taken a fancy to. It was an unequal game though. Her strength was going fast, the water was very cold, although the night was warm. Five minutes more, nay three, nay two, and the struggle would be at an end.

Huddled like a frog, his knees and chin almost touching each other, Phelim Daly lay upon the rock and watched her dully, sick, despairing apathy written upon every line of his small white face, his big, always

unnaturally prominent, eyes staring down with hardly a trace of comprehension or intelligence in them. Again Grania struggled forward, and again the capricious water washed her a trifle nearer to the rock, and to comparative safety—washed her once almost within touch of it. Her face, with its clinging masses of black hair, had grown very white now, nearly as white as that of the boy gazing vacantly down at her from only a few feet above her head. With a sudden effort, a sudden concentration of despair and of hopelessness, she again uttered a cry for help ; a wild, ringing cry which rang out far and wide through the silence, away out into the big, lonely Atlantic, flinging her hands at the same time over her head, her straining eyes gazing round and round with the agonising, longing stare of desperation. Was no one coming to her help, then ? No one ? *no one ?*

‘Murdough !’ she cried. Then, after a pause, ‘Murdough . . . ’tis drowning I am ! For God’s sake, come to me ! Murdough ! Murdough !’

But there was no Murdough. There was no response of any sort, no help or hint or suggestion of help. There was only the swaying water ; only the dimly-seen foam-streaked surface ; only the white, closely-enveloping shroud of fog ; only Phelim’s small face peering helplessly over the rock ; so few feet away in reality, such miles and miles for any practical purpose.

The tide was running out now, and it took her along with it, but so slowly, so insensibly, that it was the faintest, most barely perceptible movement. The silence everywhere was extraordinary. The sea under its close-fitting shroud seemed as absolutely unruffled as the basin of some indoors fountain. Not a ripple anywhere ; only that same slow

internal movement, a movement hardly to be perceived upon the surface ; only the gradual undertow of the tide drawing everything stealthily in one direction. Sea, sky, land, water, everything seemed alike to be lapped in the drowsiest, the most complete and immovable repose. Sleep seemed everywhere to be the order of the hour, to have taken possession of all things. The very atoms of seaweed as they floated along appeared to partake and be half conscious of that placidity.

Grania had ceased now to struggle. She was sinking slowly, but she still kept her head partially above the surface. Had there been the slightest movement in the water all would have been over before this, but, as it was, death, too, seemed to linger, to share in the general suspension of all things, to delay and hover. Suddenly a quantity of brown seaweed, stirred by the changing tide, swept round the corner of the big rock and floated

down towards her. It was a mass of enormously long laminaria, grown, not within tide-marks, but out in the deeper, more abysmal region, as leathery in texture, as solid, and seemingly as sustaining, as the branch of a forest tree, the thick strands welded together by years of growth in deep water. It floated up to her, then under her, half lifting her upon itself as upon a raft, her hands clutching in the thick oily strands, her whole body sustained and for the moment uplifted by it.

With this feeling of support from below a new look came into her face ; her eyes opened widely, and she suddenly stretched out her hands.

‘Augh, Murdough ! Murdough !’ she murmured deliriously. ‘ Didn’t I know you’d come ? Didn’t I know you’d never leave your poor Grania to drown by herself in the cruel salt sea ? Arrah, take me up, then, darling, take me up ! Be quick, dear, and

gather me up out of this cold, creeping water ! Augh, but 'tis the strong arms you have, though you would always have it 'twas me was the strongest, you rogue ! Hold me closer to you, Murdough dear ; hold me closer, I say ; closer ! closer still ! Augh, Murdough ! . . . *Murdougeen !*'

And with a movement as if Murdough Blake had indeed come at last to the rescue, and was lifting her in his arms, she let her head fall back upon the seaweed, her cheek resting upon it as if upon his shoulder, her eyes at the same time closing with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction, and so resting and so sighing she sank slowly, insensibly, and without a struggle into the great folds of the laminaria, which, after supporting her in that position for perhaps a minute, began gently to loosen its long sashlike strands, floating presently away by degrees over the hardly undulating surface, returning again and again,

and sweeping back, though in a less compact mass, now under, now over, now round her, the great brown ribbons swaying in easy serpentine curves about the floating form, the two getting to be hardly distinguishable in the all-pervading dreaminess, a dreaminess of which the very fog itself seemed to be but a part; a dream too deep and apparently too satisfactory to be ever again disturbed or broken in upon by anything from without.

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Six or seven hours later the first fishermen astir upon Aranmore, chancing to go out upon the cliff, saw little Phelim Daly still crouched upon the same rock; still staring down with the same terrified, widely-opened eyes into the waste of waters below him. He was promptly rescued, and carried to the nearest cabin, where, when his wits had partially thawed, his errand was either ex-

tracted from him, or possibly was guessed without being extracted ; in any case, Father Tom was shortly afterwards summoned, and within an hour was on his way to Inishmaan, through the still thick, but by this time penetrable fog, to visit the dying woman.

He was in time. Honor was still alive and perfectly conscious of his coming. Her sunken eyes lit with delight, and her hands clasped one another rapturously as the black figure entered the cabin door. She looked eagerly behind it for Grania, having been told by old Molly that she had gone herself to Aranmore to fetch him, but when it was explained to her that Grania had stopped to rest at Kilronan she was satisfied, and asked no more. Once again she looked round the cabin questioningly, evidently perplexed and disappointed, when the preparations had all been made, and everything was ready for the last rites, and still there was no Grania to

share them with her. That the sister who had never left her, never once in all those weary days and nights, should have left her now; should have deserted her in this extremity; left her to pass alone through the last dark gate, without her hand to hold by, her face to look to, her shoulder to lean on, must have seemed very strange to her—very strange, no doubt, and very unaccountable. She did not utter any complaints about it, however. She had been too patient all her life to be impatient now. If it was mysterious, why, everything else for that matter was mysterious too. The Familiar was receding, the Unfamiliar approaching fast, coming nearer and nearer every moment. After her long probation, after her tedious waiting, she was at last upon the verge of that looked-for, that intensely-desired country; a country which, if to most of us it seems but a dream within a dream, a floating mirage, a

phantom made up of love and faith, of hope and of yearning desire—unthinkable, untenable, all but impossible—was to Honor, and is to such as Honor, no phantom, no mirage, but the soberest and solidest of solid realities; the thing for which they live, the hope for which they die. Real or unreal, fact or fancy, it was coming rapidly towards her now. She was floating towards it as fast as ever she could float; hurrying breathlessly, as a stream hurries when it nears the sea. Long before the fog had completely melted away, long before ordinary matter-of-fact daylight had returned to Inishmaan, her journey thither was accomplished. Already, even while the priest stood beside her, while the prayers she had so longed for, those prayers which Grania had died to obtain for her, were being uttered, she was drifting across its borderland; already its sounds rather than his voice, rather than any earthly

voices, were in her ears; already her foot was upon its threshold. And upon that threshold, perhaps—who knows?—who can tell?—they met.

THE END.

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